Gauguin, Nietzsche, Aurier: Notes on Symbolism's Material Inversion*

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> *Musicians find enjoyment through the ear, but we, with our insatiable and rutting eye, taste pleasures that are endless.*
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> —Paul Gauguin, letter to Émile Schuffenecker, September 1888

> *Art, as the artist practices it—do you not grasp what it is: a murderous assault against all forms of decency?*
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> —Nietzsche, *Unpublished Fragments,* Autumn 1887

Among all the commonplaces borne along by art history, one of the least debatable is the opposition that appeared at the turn of the 1890s between symbolism and naturalism. From Schiller to Baudelaire, writers and philosophers had railed against the market society and the supreme power of "utility," and their imprecations were now to be taken up and amplified. In the midst of what Remy de Gourmont described, in 1892, as "the base slavery where we grovel, a dotard people," any aesthetic approach that took as its object contemporary reality, or indeed reality of any sort, was felt to be ignoble. "The myopic copying of social anecdotes" was scarcely more scandalous than "the imbecilic imitation of the warts of nature" (Aurier, 1892 [p. 608]).[1] The anathema struck not only the realism that

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1. The writer Gabriel-Albert Aurier, whom we shall be following especially in this text, was the main critical writer on symbolist painting; at any rate, he was the most tenacious in constructing a theory of it. In less than three years (he died in October 1892, at the age of twenty-seven), Aurier published the first substantial studies in favor of Van Gogh and Gauguin. At the same time, in a series of articles that were just as much manifestos, he formulated and tried to establish a Neoplatonic theory of art that he

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emerged out of Courbet, dismissed by Maurice Denis in 1895 as an "unconscious genius [who] proffered legendary stupidities,"[2] but also Impressionism. Aurier considered the latter to be "a refined, spiritualized, dilettante realism, but a realism all the same" (1891 [p. 367]), although he was to add some nuance to this in 1892. Denis was to explain much later, "We were reacting with magnanimity against what was low, vulgar, and mediocre in the schools that had immediately preceded us, against the materialism and naturalism that were then in vogue."[3]

In this struggle, the painters, who were called successively cloisonnists, synthetists, neo-traditionists, ideists, symbolists, and deformers,[4] relied tactically (and confusedly) on a number of philosophical, religious, and poetical references. Denis spoke of "a unique mixture of Plotinus, Edgar Poe, Baudelaire, and Schopenhauer."[5] Bernard yearned for "the coming of an art that would be itself *an artist,* a mystical, idealist, thinking art."[6] And Filiger, a little later, summing up his approach, was to write, "What I seek is to give a concrete form to abstract ideas by means of a few simple formulae, in accord with the eternal logic without which nothing is true and all remains without significance . . . "[7]

But it is mainly Aurier, the writer and poet, who was to try to make a coherent doctrine out of the vague aspirations of painters. Pushing against the naturalist creed and going back past the theory of ideal beauty that had dominated the French classical age, Aurier encouraged a strict return to the Platonic concept of the *Idea.* The artist must be the "expresser of absolute beings," seeing in the objects of the world "relative beings that are only the translation, proportional to the relativity of our intellect, of absolute and essential beings, the Ideas" (1891 [p. 370]). Aurier claimed for painters the right " . . . to be preoccupied [. . .] by this ideist substratum that is everywhere in the universe, and that, according to Plato, is the sole true reality—the rest being only appearance, only shadows." And he argued further, " . . . In nature, every object is only, at bottom, a signified Idea [. . .] all the elements of pictorial language, lines, planes, shadows, light, col-

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called *ideism.* In my text, I shall refer in particular to the following articles: "Les isolés: Vincent Van Gogh," *Mercure de France,* January 1890; "Le symbolisme en peinture: Paul Gauguin," *Mercure de France,* March 1891; "Les symbolistes," *Revue encyclopédique,* April 1892 [1892a]; and "Préface pour un livre de critique d'art," *Mercure de France,* December 1892 [1892b]. [Editor's note: In 2021, Aurier's *Œuvres complètes,* edited by Julien Schuh, was published by Éditions du Sandre in Paris. From this point on in the text, all page numbers between brackets will refer to this publication.]

[2] Maurice Denis, "À propos de l'exposition d'A. Séguin" (1895), reprinted in *Théories, 1890–1910: Du Symbolisme et de Gauguin vers un nouvel ordre classique* (1912), 4th ed. (Paris: Rouart et Watelin, 1920), p. 22.

[3] Maurice Denis, "Le Symbolisme et l'art religieux moderne" (1918), reprinted in Denis, *Nouvelles théories sur l'art moderne, sur l'art sacré, 1914–1921* (Paris: Rouart et Watelin, 1922), p. 171.

[4] Denis, "À propos de l'exposition d'A. Séguin," p. 20.

[5] Denis, "Le Symbolisme et l'art religieux moderne," p. 172.

[6] Émile Bernard in the collection *Lettres à Redon,* ed. Arï Redon (Paris: José Corti, 1960), p. 205.

[7] Letter dated February 1907, *Filiger* exh. cat. (Saint-Germain-en-Laye: Musée départemental du Prieuré, 1981), p. 15.

ors," serve no purpose other than "the expression of a given idea, dream, or thought" (1892a [pp. 613–14]).

Beginning in 1890, it was the Idea that Aurier believed he could locate behind Van Gogh's raging style: "In almost all of his canvases, under this morphic envelope, this so real flesh, this so real matter, there lies, for the mind that can see it, a thought, an Idea, and this Idea, the essential substratum of the work, is at the same time its efficient and final cause" (1890 [p. 290]). As for Gauguin, Aurier sees in him, "one could almost say, Plato visually interpreted by a savage of genius" (1892a [p. 616])—a phrase in which we see combined, typically enough, two *states* of a single movement of regression: both towards the original model, the matrix, the concept, innocent still of *any* inscription in matter, *and* towards the primitive, the unpolluted, the geographical sphere untouched by the vices of civilization.

It is thus very much the reference to Plato (used in a positive way)[8] that comes into play in counterattack against naturalism's impoverished and repetitive discourse on the "faithful and simple" representation of everyday life. Mimesis is led back to its point of departure: it is no longer a question of copying the world of appearances, but rather one of returning to the original Idea—unchangeable, universal, eternal—that was deposited into our souls before our descent here below (*Phaedo*, 75b, d).

This reference to Plato is omnipresent in Aurier,[9] and I wish here to interrogate it by showing how the symbolism vs. naturalism opposition works as a system. Beyond the fact that it muddies our view of what it is in symbolism that prolongs and completes impressionism, the main effect of the opposition is to obscure otherwise deep tensions, where it is the relation of the painter to his object, and even his status as author and subject, that is in question.

The first contradiction that arises concerns principally the question of the subject. The "ideist" discourse attempted to combine—and most often was content simply to set side by side—the Platonic definition, which asserted the innateness of a schema always already imprinted in the artist's head, and the "idea" in the sense that it had during the Renaissance (*concetto, pensiero*), i.e., the design in the painter's head before the actual execution of the painting, and referring even to the theme or the "story" that he was to depict. This second definition, once it stressed fully the gestation of the work, could only, ultimately, favor and justify the rise of subjectivity. We find a faint trace of this in Aurier: the "ideist," in order to present the Idea more intensely, can allow himself, he says, expressive deformations.[10] In this way, Aurier makes room for the imaginative faculty and for personal investigations. The whole difficulty, for the theoreticians of symbolism, lay in trying to reconcile the archaizing austerity of Platonism, hostile to any individual creative suggestion[11] or to any originality of line, with the impulses of an era that claimed, and with such great vehemence, the centrality of the subject, the full assumption of the Ego—a claim generally backed up by a partial and often hasty reading of Schopenhauer.[12] Baudelaire's dandy was the exacerbated, but already outdated, social figure of this hypertrophy (consider, for that matter, how the "studious decrepitude" of Huysmans's Des Esseintes ends in delirium and neurosis).

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[8] It is well known that Plato condemned the making of images (simulacra) insofar as they were untrustworthy copies of the objects of the world, the latter being themselves only imperfect projections, unclear copies of the original Ideas. For a discussion of these questions, and on the development of the notion of the Idea up to the French classical age, see Erwin Panofsky, *Idea: A Concept in Art Theory* [1924], trans. Joseph J. S. Peake (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1968).

[9] The schism between essence and appearance is reinforced in Plotinus (a frequent reference for the symbolists), for whom form must *vanquish* matter, the latter being always seen as bad and resistant. Cf. Panofsky, p. 53.

And yet, however strong the contradiction between an often pathetic subjectivism and the immobile serenity of the Platonic Idea might appear, they did have one point of commonality. Whether the source were, even obscurely, Plato, Plotinus, or Ficino, or even Aristotle, it was always a case of ensuring the preeminence of a "good" form (pre-established) at the expense of a substance stamped with the mark of inertia. The duality of form and substance was preserved. But we can see how this duality became, in its turn, unsustainable with the spread of the romantic conception of art such as it was developed at the turn of the nineteenth century, first in Germany and then—thanks to Madame de Staël—in France, where it was embraced by Baudelaire and Delacroix. From its very first suppositions, romanticism gives full vigor to a thought that was found already in Aristotle and the Mannerists: Man creates not *after* nature but *as* nature. Analyzing the ideas of Karl Philipp Mortiz, Tzvetan Todorov writes in his *Theories of the Symbol*: "[For Mortiz] the artist, not the work, copies nature, and he does this by producing works [. . .]: . . . the artist's characteristic capability is a *Bildungskraft*, a formative (or productive) faculty . . . " And Mortiz himself says: "The *born artist* is not content to observe nature, he has to imitate it, take it as his model, he has to form (*bilden*) and create as nature does."[13] This is a thesis we find echoed in Baudelaire's famous statement: "A good picture, faithful and worthy of the dreams which gave it birth, must be created like a world."[14] Like a world: the coming of the "instant of formation," of the "process of production." "The nature of the beautiful," Moritz goes on, "consists in this, that its inner being lies beyond the limits of the power of thought, in its emergence, in its own becoming." This is the theory of the exploding of thought, to be taken up soon by Schelling—a theory that would be devoured by the organic and instinctual conception of art that was to be Delacroix's leitmotif: "We must therefore be almost beyond ourselves if we are to achieve all that we are capable of doing" (*Journal*, January 25, 1857).[15] Delacroix's leitmotif would very soon become that of Gauguin: " . . . my temperament forces me to do a picture feverishly" (to Monfreid, July 13, 1897). " . . . I worked day and night that whole month in an incredible fever. To be sure it is not done like a Puvis de Chavannes, sketch after nature, preparatory cartoon, etc. It is all done straight from the brush on sackcloth full of knots and wrinkles, so the appearance is terribly rough" (to Monfreid, February 1898).[16]

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[10] " . . . the goal being no longer the direct and immediate reproduction of the object, all the elements of pictorial language (lines, planes, shadows, light, color) become, as one will see, abstract elements that can be combined, attenuated, exaggerated, and deformed according to their own expressive modality in order to arrive at the general aim of the work: the expression of a given idea, dream, or thought." G.-A. Aurier (1892a [p. 614]).

[11] Plato, in *The Laws* (II, 656), wonders at the thousand-year permanence of Egyptian art, ruled by strict and intangible principles that people were forbidden from transgressing.

[12] Schopenhauer's massive work, *The World as Will and Representation* (1819), had just been translated into French (1888). The thought of disillusion, repetition, spread-out time, and the interchangeable subject was "optimized" in commentaries such as this one from Remy de Gourmont in his *Idealism* (Paris, 1893): "One knows only one's own intelligence, only oneself, the sole reality, the special and unique world that the ego holds, carries, deforms, extenuates, and re-creates according its personal activity; nothing happens outside of the knowing subject; everything that I think is real; my sole reality is thought."

[13] Tzvetan Todorov, *Theories of the Symbol* [1977], trans. Catherine Porter (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1982), pp. 153–54.

[14] Charles Baudelaire, "The Salon of 1859," in *Baudelaire: Selected Writings on Art and Artists*, trans. P. E. Charvet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), p. 305.

With this intense valorization of the instinctual, of improvisation, of the bodily involvement of the painter, we find ourselves at the antipodes of Aurier's Neoplatonic conceptions insofar as they asserted the suprasensible nature of the Idea. Nothing is here carried over onto the canvas that is not *in the very immediate moment* invented. The work is less executed than it is *invested.* If it is necessary to think it in order to do it, then it is also necessary to do it in order to think it. The classical projective theory of art, relayed by Alberti,[17] hammered into shape by Ingres, and still to be found in Kandinsky, was henceforth incompatible with the actual practice of painters.

At a stroke, what I referred to at the outset as the circumstantial, tactical, and polemical aspect of the Neoplatonic reference becomes much clearer. Segalen refers to "the beautiful and healthy bites with which this youth devoured the meat of the—not so much well hung as putrid—naturalist beef."[18] This was a naturalism that was running out of steam, turning sour (Zola's *L'Œuvre* dates from 1886), and that continued, as if impoverished by the repetition, to harp on the same arguments, which came down, little by little, to this one basic plea: "to sound authentic" in expressing "the habits, the customs, and the settings" of the time. Calling upon painters, Duranty, one of the founders of the realist school, prophesied:

> Someday, perhaps, the living woman with her turned-up nose will evict that Greek Venus of marble with her straight nose and heavy chin. She

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[15] *The Journal of Eugène Delacroix*, trans. Lucy Norton (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc.), p. 347.

[16] *The Letters of Paul Gauguin to Georges-Daniel de Monfreid*, trans. Ruth Pielkovo (New York: Dodd, Mead, and Company, 1922), pp. 72, 94.

[17] " . . . we will strive so that, for us, all objects are disposed in such a way that in a work there is nothing of which we do not know in what place it must be located in an excellent way." Leon Battista Alberti, *On Painting*, trans. Rocco Sinisgalli (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 82.

[18] Victor Segalen, preface to the *Lettres de Gauguin à Georges-Daniel de Monfreid* (Paris: Georges Crès & Cie). I cite here the 1930 edition.

> has embedded herself in your brain like debris from an ancient frieze that the mason has built into a wall, once the excavation is over.

And he set out as a program for artists:

> . . . a vast series about society people, priests, peasants, soldiers, workers, and merchants. In such a series characters would differ in their individual roles, yet be linked by those scenes common to all [. . .] marriages, baptisms, births, successions, celebrations, and family scenes.[19]

But if realism and naturalism had once thought they saw in the promotion of contemporary *themes* a radical way of throwing off the yoke of a sickly academicism, Aurier's ideist critique, by way of a symmetrical error, was to bear upon the *themes* of naturalism. And what he demanded above all from his painter friends, in order to counter Jules Bastien-Lepage and Édouard Detaille, was a new iconographical program that would be "idealist, mystical even" (1891 [p. 368]). Recommending the simplification of the figured object (synthetism) and a more expansive decorative aspect to painting (muralism), he demanded no less than that every figural inscription be subordinated to a conceptual and linguistic premise: "The objects, in the painting, have no value as objects [. . .] they are only signs, words, having in themselves no other importance." It was a question of "writing clearly the ideic signification of the object" (1891 [p. 371]). There is no pictorial fact that is not nameable. For the ideist, as for the realist, nothing counts in the painting outside of what is ascribable to a nomenclature ("that object there in reality" for the realist, and the Idea of that object for the ideist). In this way, Aurier (whose critical vocabulary always, symptomatically, took the practice of writing as its reference, e.g., "word," "write," "translation," etc.)[20] failed to perceive one of the revolutionary aspects of the art of his time, an element that was present in the production of the symbolists as well as in that of the impressionists, which was the progressive deconstruction of the iconic sign, the laying bare of what, in the work, exceeds any designation or description of the object. Thus with impressionism, or again in the work of Vuillard and Bonnard, we see the diluting of the object, not into light (the naturalist interpretation), but into the texture, the mark, the brushstroke. Thus also in Gauguin, Bernard, and Denis, we see the arrival of non-mimetic expanses of color that nonetheless, quite clearly, produce pictorial effects.

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[19] Louis Émile Edmond Duranty, "The New Painting," in *The New Painting: Impressionism 1874–1886*, ed. Charles S. Moffett (San Francisco: The Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, 1986), pp. 40, 45.

[20] We should understand as purely rhetorical the question Aurier asks later in the 1891 article: "How, in effect, to suggest in words the whole inexpressible, the whole ocean of Ideas that the clairvoyant eye can see in these magisterial canvases [of Gauguin]" [p. 373]. It is the accumulation, the inextricable condensation, of the Ideas that makes them inexpressible for Aurier, rather than any outflanking of meaning by the pictorial substance.

This is the essential failing of an approach subject-bound to the imperialism of the concept. Exclusively attentive to the Idea, to the thing that incarnates it, the thing that names it, Aurier, in his desire to extricate art from naturalism, thrice locks it in the prison house of language. Reduced to an activity of identifying, vision is brought in line with the restrictive notion of it that Hegel proposed in his *Aesthetics.* As is well known, Hegel dismisses, in the perception of a work of art, the sense of "touch," and accordingly all tactile values, guilty in his eyes of destroying the spiritual integrity of the object:

> For by the sense of touch the individual subject, as a sensuous individual, is simply related to what is sensuously individual and its weight, hardness, softness, and material resistance. The work of art, however, is not purely sensuous but the spirit appearing in the sensuous.[21]

The object "should be contemplated in its independent objectivity," and it is vision, the "theoretical" sense, that allows for this relation:

> Sight, on the other hand, has a purely theoretical relation to objects by means of light, this as it were non-material matter. This for its part lets objects persist freely and independently; it makes them shine and appear but, unlike air and fire, it does not consume them in practice whether unnoticeably or openly. To vision, void of desire, everything is presented which exists materially in space as something outside everything else, but which, because it remains undisturbed in its integrity, is manifest only in its shape and color.[22]

Void of desire . . . The very logic of idealism, aiming at the "spirit" through the unitary appearance of the object (the object in the painting, or painting as object), demands the promotion of a sense that is "cold," resistant to both material seductions and the rush of empathy. For the risk, at each moment, is that of seeing the subject taken up in a sensualistic dispersion, fixated by the seductions of color and texture, and scattered in a fragmentary grasping of the work. This threat—and I shall come back to this—targets *both* the expression of the Idea (the "substratum"), which will emerge in its purity only at the expense of the annihilation of substance, *and* the unity of the viewing subject, who loses centrality and mastery in the movement of the sensory experience. Aurier's idealism was at the furthest remove from the notion put forward by a contemporary of symbolism, Alois Riegl, who made a distinction between two states of vision: the *optic* and the *haptic* (from the Greek *hapto,* meaning to touch). Riegl's haptic is not exactly the tactile sense; it is rather what in vision refers to an experience that is connected with the materiality of the work, i.e., connected with the latter's grain and resistance.[23] Aurier's ideist theory, in contrast, was entirely aimed at the repression of the potential expressivity of the material constituents of the painting: color, texture, surface, limit. As we shall see, the theory went against the evidence of a pictorial practice that was increasingly committed to the investigation of these very same material components.

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[21] G. W. F. Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art,* vol. II, trans. T. M. Knox (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), p. 621.

[22] Ibid., p. 622.

This sort of misunderstanding involving a rift between theory and practice is nothing new. Idealist discourse, from Winckelmann to Mondrian, was a red herring, a diversion from and a covering over of a working practice that was always able to find within itself the elements of its own formal advance. When neoclassicism, in the eighteenth century, demanded of its contemporaries that they reproduce the severity, the regularity, "the noble simplicity and serene grandeur" of Greek art, and when it proscribed in the name of the Ideal any naturalistic indulgence, it actually obtained, through and beyond the program it inspired, effects such as: restrained depth, refinement of line, assertion of surface, control of smoothness and whiteness—so many commitments that indicated that painters, sculptors, and engravers were taking full charge of the tangible and prosaic character of their material. The same reversal of practice against theory is present in Hegel when, in a very perceptive section, he points out a painter's most challenging "motif," the human cheek:

> . . . the most difficult thing in the matter of color, the ideal or, as it were, the summit of coloring, is "carnation," the color tone of human flesh, which unites all other colors marvelously in itself without giving independent emphasis to either one or another. The youthful and healthy red of the cheeks is pure carmine without any dash of blue, violet, or yellow; but this red is itself only a gloss, or rather a shimmer, which seems to press outwards from within and then shades off unnoticeably into the rest of the flesh-color, although this latter is an ideal interpenetration [*Ineinander*] of all the fundamental colors. Through the transparent yellow of the skin there shines the red of the arteries and the blue of the veins . . . [24]

Is it not obvious that, in this analytical approach to the color of a cheek, Hegel's attention is focused precisely by the example of painting in its materiality: glazes, color chords, pigmentary opacities. Hegel is only able to so well enumerate guage. We might consider, for example, how one effect of Grünewald's painting on Huysmans was the long hagiographical account that he gave, in 1901, of Saint Lidwina of Schiedam's martyrdom. Huysmans describes, in detail after detail, like so many close-ups on a painting, the shredded flesh, slowly and endlessly oozing and putrefying, with parts that are lustrous and others matte—a flesh punctured, encrusted, swollen. Where Huysmans claimed to be showing us an edifying case of mystical substitution (an innocent woman expiates through inconceivable suffering the sins of humanity), we can identify another case of substitution: that of the pictorial substance filling in the work of literature. We might also, but in another register, see this return of the material agency in Mallarmé (whose fame began to spread, thanks to Verlaine and Huysmans, after 1884). As Maurice Blanchot says of Mallarmé:

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[23] Alois Riegl, *Late Roman Art Industry* [1902], trans. Rolf Winkes (Rome: Bretschneider Editore, 1985). See also Henri Maldiney's comment in *Regard Parole Espace* (Lausanne: L'Âge d'Homme, 1973), p. 194 sq., "In the haptic space, vision is attached to the motif in the way of touch; it constitutes the latter's visual analogue."

[24] Hegel, *Aesthetics*, pp. 846–47, translation slightily modified. [Editor's note: The French translation used by Clay is by the eminent philosopher and musicologist Vladimir Jankélevitch, and with regard to the sentences or single words that he quotes and upon which he bases his comment, this translation seems to be closer to the original German text than Knox's English rendering, which is why, with the help of Daniel Heller-Roazen, Knox's text has been modified on two occasions. His translation for *Ineinander* was "inter-association," while in the following paragraph that of the highly unusual ***durchsichtig tief***, crucial for Clay's argument, was "transparent, profound."

> Now he gives language—whose unreal force of absence he had pondered—all the existence and all the material reality that this very language had been commanded to dispel. The "tacit flight of abstraction" is transformed into a visible landscape of words. I no longer say "a flower"; I draw it with syllables.[27]

This is the restitution in sound of the "absent," but it is also the assumption of the physical space of the book as the "total expansion of the letter,"[28] as the "blanks" take on importance and "the paper intervenes each time an image, of its own accord, ceases or withdraws."[29] Writing can only authentically take place on condition that one is able to " . . . imagine a certain motif in a certain place, page and height . . . "[30] Recounting his first encounter with *Un Coup de dés*, Valéry wrote: "It seemed to me that I was looking at the form and pattern of a thought, placed for the first time in finite space. Here space itself truly spoke, dreamed, and gave birth to temporal forms."[31]

Whatever their mystical intentions and philosophical musings (whether moralizing or ideistic), the synthetists, cloisonnists, and the Nabis all stood on this very same material ground. One could draw up an endless catalogue of their investigations into how to give to the surface—what the Renaissance sought to make "transparent" like a window—a concrete and "palpable" quality. Investigations into reflection, brilliance, or, in contrast, mattness, coarseness, and chalkiness, etc. As Fénéon wrote, referring to Paul Serusier, " . . . like Gauguin, [Serusier] works on canvases impregnated with Meudon white. On a support that is so absorbent, and yet furthermore of dubious solidity, his painting is absolutely matte, like so many thickets thrown up by the flat brushstrokes." And, referring to Paul Ranson, Fénéon again spoke of "pastel that must have been dipped in a preparation of glue."[32] Gauguin himself, writing about his painting *Nevermore* in one of his letters to Monfreid, explained:

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[27] Maurice Blanchot, *The Book to Come* [1959], trans. Charlotte Mandell (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), p. 240.

[28] Stéphane Mallarmé, "About the Book" [1895], in *Divagations*, trans. Barbara Johnson (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 2007), p. 228.

[29] Stéphane Mallarmé, preface to *Un Coup de dés* [1897], trans. Henry Weinfield in *Stéphane Mallarmé: Collected Poems* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), p. 121.

[30] Mallarmé, *Divagations*, p. 228.

[31] Paul Valéry, "Concerning A Throw of the Dice," in *Collected Works of Paul Valéry*, vol. 8, trans. Malcolm Cowley and James R. Lawler (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1972), p. 309.

> I simply wished to suggest with the simple nude, a certain barbaric luxury of ancient times. Voluntarily it is bathed in sad and somber colors. Neither silk nor velvet nor cambric nor gold forms this luxury, but only the medium, made rich by the touch of the artist (February 14, 1897).[33]

And a little later he wrote,

> I am going to give you a bit of technical advice, do with it as you like. Mix a lot of fine sand with your earth pigment. It will make many useful difficulties for you and will keep you from seeing the surface[34] and from falling into the saccharine atrocities of the Beaux Arts school.[35]

We can see also how in the early works of Charles Filiger the expressive use of the reserve is emphasized, along with that of scraping, as a means to favor the co-presence of image and support. And then came the moment, as Marie-Amélie describes it, when Filiger "introduced gold into his works; in *Christ with Angels*, the faces are set within a fine gilded line. Later, in *Head of a Saint*, he spreads the gold discreetly within the face, trailed throughout the profile so as to underscore the mystical nature of the scene." Furthermore, the gold is "applied in wide striations over the entire body of the child, and projected in stars on the midnight blue background [. . .]."[36]

Yet Gauguin went much further, assigning to painting's material specific properties a "differential" nature that it was the artist's vocation to bring to light. In his "Notes on Art at the Universal Exhibition" (the one of 1889 that included the Eiffel Tower), he wrote:

> Of course this exhibition is the triumph of iron, not only with regard to machines but also with regard to architecture. And yet architecture is at its beginnings, in that, as an art, it lacks a style of decoration consistent with the material. [. . .] Better to have monsters of bolted iron. Also,

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[32] Félix Fénéon, "Quelques peintres idéistes," *Le Chat noir*, September 19, 1891. Reprinted in *Œuvres plus que complètes* (Geneva: Librairie Droz, vol. 1), pp. 200–202.

[33] *The Letters of Paul Gauguin to Georges-Daniel de Monfreid*, p. 77.

[34] As suggested by the context, Gauguin is referring here to the surface of the figured objects and not to the surface medium of the painting.

[35] *The Letters of Paul Gauguin to Georges-Daniel de Monfreid*, p. 89. Translation slightly modified.

[36] *Filiger*, p. 10.

> why repaint iron so it looks like butter, why this gilding as if in the Opera [house]? No, that is not good taste. Iron, iron, and more iron![37]

And later in the same text:

> In ceramics, both the shaping and the drawing must be adapted "harmoniously to the material used." I will ask sculptors to give careful thought to this question of adaptation. Plaster, wood, marble, bronze, and fired clay must not all be modeled the same way, since each of these substances has a different type of solidity, of hardness, of aspect.[38]

We can take the measure, then, of how Gauguin, in attributing a specific expressivity to "each substance," is distancing himself from Aurier's projective concepts. It is not the immutable Idea that comes to be imprinted in the inertia of the substance; rather, quite the contrary, it is the substance that elicits and channels the intervention that establishes it as a work of art. Thus we see the beginnings of a decisive inversion of emphasis: the more the proximity and immediacy of the work is asserted, the more the latter's *a priori* reference, the external world, finds itself attenuated. And reciprocally, in response to the effacing of the (external) referent we see the (internal) organic manifestness of the work. Here again, it was the German Romantics who had opened the way by positing, along with Moritz, that a work of art "signifies itself." Self-sufficient, intransitive, it finds its own end within itself.[39] A century later, something close to this very same idea was to find its aphoristic (and therefore compulsive) form in Denis's famous phrase: "Remember that a painting—before it is a battle horse, a female nude, or some sort of anecdote, is essentially a flat surface covered with colors arranged in a certain order" (1890, reprinted in *Theories*, p. 1). The "before it is," we should note in passing, is also to be taken chronologically. In Denis's genealogy, the self-sufficiency of the pictorial constituents is always primary and original: "In the beginning, [there is] the pure arabesque, with as little trompe-l'oeil about it as possible; a wall is empty: fill it with symmetrical marks, harmonious in color (stained glass, Egyptian paintings, Byzantine mosaics, kakemonos)" (ibid., p. 7).

Essentially, Denis's lapidary formula condenses the intuitions of French Romanticism, and principally those of Delacroix (whose *Journal*, incidentally, was not to appear in print until 1893), but also Baudelaire, who had written: "Line and color, both of them have the power to set one thinking and dreaming; the pleasures which spring from them are of different natures, but of a perfect equality and absolutely independent of the subject of the picture."[40] From the outset, and in print after 1895, Denis moved away from "ideism," conscious as he was of Aurier's conceptual and figurative presuppositions (once they were subject to the supremacy of the Idea) and of the reversal of direction that was working itself through in the painting of his own time. In 1896, he was to write that his friends were "too much taken with painting to give themselves over to idealist reveries." And as for symbolism, he said, "certainly not, it was not an idealist theory [. . .], [it was] the immediate result of the positivist philosophies, [. . .] the most strictly scientific endeavor in art."[41] The generation that recognized itself in Gauguin was able to state clearly that the main issue in painting had shifted ground. Painting's basic concern was no longer the relation between painting and the world (how to depict), but the relation between the painting and the viewing subject. The referent (nature for the naturalists, and its ideal correlative for the idealists) was expelled from theoretical discourse just as it was soon (in the twentieth century) to be banished from painting. A painting stood no longer as a sign for something else—it was its own indivisible mass.[42]

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[37] Paul Gauguin, "Notes on Art at the Universal Exhibition," in *Paul Gauguin: The Writings of a Savage*, trans. Eleanor Levieux (New York: Da Capo Press, 1996), p. 28. Françoise Cachin notes that Gauguin's views here conceivably echo those of Viollet-le-Duc. She likens the artist's exhortation "Iron, iron, more iron!" to Viollet-le-Duc's functionalism in his *Entretiens sur l'architecture*, e.g., "Stone should look like stone, iron like iron and wood like wood." Françoise Cachin, *Gauguin* [1988], trans. Bambi Ballard (Paris: Flammarion, 2003), p. 92.

[38] Gauguin, "Notes on Art at the Universal Exhibition," p. 31.

[39] Todorov, p. 160. The author cites, as an example, this statement from Moritz: "Seeing a beautiful object, I must feel pleasure uniquely for its own sake; to this end the absence of external finality has to be compensated for by an internal finality; the object must be something fully realized in itself" (p. 157).

[40] Charles Baudelaire, "Peintures murales d'Eugène Delacroix à Saint-Sulpice," *La Revue fantaisiste*, September 15, 1861, in *The Mirror of Art: Critical Studies by Charles Baudelaire*, trans. Jonathan Mayne (New York: Phaidon, 1955), p. 315. See also Hegel's definition in his *Aesthetics* (vol. III, part I): " . . . in painting, the highest degree of liveliness can be expressed only in color. Yet this magic of pure appearance may ultimately be asserted so preponderantly that the subject of the painting becomes in comparison a matter of indifference. In this way, just precisely as sculpture in the further development of reliefs begins to approach painting, so painting in the pure sfumato and magic of its tones of color and their contrast, and the fusion and play of their harmony, begins to swing over to music" (p. 853). Hegel, if only to worry himself with it, remarks here on the relative erasure of the figured object, and on the "liveliness" of color as it draws its power from its autonomous combinations. Delacroix, Baudelaire, Gauguin, and Kandinsky will all take up (positively) the comparison with music (which joins to the advantage of abstracting painting from any external referent the inconvenience of expelling from it the textural component). In his *Charmes et leçons de l'Italie* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1933), p. 177, Maurice Denis writes: "I was unaware at the time of Taine's definition, so very close to my own, 'A painting is a colored surface on which the various tones and the various degrees of light are distributed with a certain choice; this is its intimate being; the fact that these tones and these degrees of light make up figures, draperies, or architectures is with them an ulterior property...' " And we know that Taine was a particularly attentive reader of Hegel.

[41] Maurice Denis, "Notes sur la peinture religieuse" (1896), in *Théories*, p. 33.

[42] Louis Dimier, in his *Histoire de la peinture française au XIXe siècle*, had well understood symbolism's breakthrough towards the pictorial object, its going beyond both naturalism and idealism to come up against the frontality of the painting. Writing about Gauguin, he noted, "They used to say that he was in reaction against impressionism, but we have to see this as less about the system [of impressionism] than about the naturalism that, in the press and in public opinion generally, was associated with it. Gauguin wanted painters to renounce the principle of depicting what they saw. The remarkable thing was that he did not set in opposition to that, as had been done since Winckelmann, the duty to depict the ideal. For the first time in a hundred years, discussion of first principles moved away from the absurd alternative (unknown for centuries beforehand) of the real and the ideal that David's reform had established. Finally, an artist came to realize that painting was neither about reproducing nature nor about giving form to dreams, but it was simply this: to make above all a colored canvas." (Cited by Denis in *Nouvelles théories sur l'art moderne et l'art sacré*, p. 24 [article dated 1916].)

But what was one to put in place of *mimesis*? The answer was the theory of "correspondences." Symbolist painting—as if terrified of its nudity and anxious to justify the *tabula rasa* it was establishing—borrowed the term from literature (Hoffmann, Éliphas Lévi, Baudelaire) and the content from Goethe's *Theory of Colors*, as well as from Delacroix. For Baudelaire, "correspondence" designates two notions (which are, moreover, complementary): a pantheistic, effusive, and co-empathetic relation with nature; and relations of synesthesia ("smells, colors, and sounds answer one another"). For Goethe and Delacroix, each color carries within itself emotive properties that do not depend in any way upon the support of an object. Gauguin and the Nabis condense these various meanings. The former spoke of "mysterious affinities that exist between our brains and certain arrangements of colors and lines" (1895). Denis sought to establish "these mysterious correspondences between beautiful forms and beautiful feelings."[43] And as early as 1890, he had written: "From the canvas itself, flat surface coated in colors, there surges up emotion, consoling or bitter, 'literary,' as the painters say, without the need for interposing the memory of another, older sensation (like that of the motif taken from nature)" (p. 10).

In truth, this was a rather curt, vague, and repetitive formulation, with no foundation other than an uncontrollable emotiveness, threatened equally by the silences of the unsayable and the transports of subjectivism. It was quite capable, as Denis was to see later, of promoting any sort of formless sketch (but, one can also say, it was an idea that was too ambitious, requiring of every viewer to have the ability to produce in language, through poetic transposition, equivalents to the painting). However often Denis was to repeat the argument for it (and whatever, on the other hand, his new options), one feels that in his writings of the 1910s, there was a retrospective lack of satisfaction with the notion of "correspondence," and even, here and there, an intuitive sense of what, in Russia, was in the process of becoming the formalist theory of art.[44] Hence, in 1917, he was to write: "The theory of the flat surface unquestionably closed *the open window onto nature*, renewing the idea of the picture as an art object, having its own laws and intrinsic necessities." And in 1918: "It is the *means* of expression (lines, forms, volumes, colors) and not the represented object that must itself be expressive."[45] It is very much as if Denis had foreseen the new theories that were gestating, as if he had surveyed the terrain of the new factors at play ("the picture's intrinsic necessities," etc.), and yet had not managed to rid himself of the symbolist idea of painting as something that provoked particular "states of feeling."

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[43] Maurice Denis, "Notes sur la peinture religieuse" (1896), p. 34.

[44] We note that the ideas of the French symbolists were known in Russia before 1914. The Nabis had exhibited there in 1908, and Denis had decorated the dining room of the famous collector Morozov. Notably, in 1909 a Russian translation of "De Gauguin et de Van Gogh au classicisme," which had just appeared in French, was published in Moscow (Cf. Valentine Marcadé, *Le Renouveau de l'art pictural russe* (Lausanne: L'Âge d'homme, 1971). According to Camilla Gray, "Denis had a great following in Russia, which he visited several times during this period, for his work, more than that of any other French painter, was sympathetic to the Petersburg Symbolist school of literature [. . .] work and articles by him were frequently reproduced in their magazines." Camilla Gray, *The Russian Experiment in Art, 1863–1922* [1962] (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1970), p. 70.

[45] In 1933, in his *Charmes et leçons d'Italie*, Denis, citing once again his canonical formulation of 1890, makes the following comparison: "Around the same time, Debussy, speaking about the 'divine arabesque' of musical primitives, said, 'In the music of Bach, it is not the character of the melody that

Formalism, whose first stirrings are to be seen in futurism and cubism, was built upon a radical challenge to symbolist pathos, at the same time as it provided instruments of analysis for the arts in general that were much more varied and effective.[46] The primary aim of painting, for Roman Jakobson and Viktor Shklovsky, was neither the representation of the external world nor the expression of private feeling. Yet the subject was not simply painterly technique (the number of layers, the kind of paintbrushes, etc.). It did not come down to a mimetic and positivistic affirmation of the material data of a painting (for example, the doubling of the flat surface by the regular application of a monochrome layer). For the formalists, it was not a case of showing pictures, but of showing *how* the pictures are made. The painting had no "message" other than its own makeup. A cubist canvas "said" only one thing: the procedure that made it possible. Art had to "expose," to "uncover," its procedures of construction. Lawrence Gowing, in his study of Cézanne, reasoned as a formalist when he wrote about the painter's early works: "He instinctively understood that in the new age the handling *was* the picture."[47]

It remains to say that for Russian formalism, the procedure's uncovering of itself can only happen within a dynamic development (Yury Tynyanov defined the unity of the work as "a dynamic integrity with its own movement"). Substance is not present to itself—its effect only comes from the deviations, displacements, and reworkings that shape it. The transmutation of the *material* constituents (color, texture, flat tint, edge) into *pictorial* operators, the unscrambling in the aesthetic field of the technical and empirical data, can only happen by the integration of the latter at a higher level of the structure. The work of art is nothing other than the modalities of this undertaking.

If I bring up the formalist method here, it is first of all because it allows me to avoid the scholarly opposition between symbolism and naturalism. As we have seen, the latter opposition, by limiting itself to the iconographic register, rather cheaply elides the analysis of artworks in terms of their material investment (there

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moves us, it is its curve: more often even it is the parallel movement of several melodic lines whose coming together, whether by chance or intention, solicits our attention [. . .] But we should not think that there is here anything artificial or unnatural. It is, on the contrary, infinitely more true than the poor little cries of people as they try to wail their way through lyric drama.'" Yet, Denis adds with a sort of nostalgia, "the religious public is not content with pure painting, and we must take account of their aspirations [. . .]. We do not have the right to pay no attention to the Lisieux pilgrim" (p. 177).

[46] Roman Jakobson underlined the philosophical influence of German Romanticism—and notably of Novalis—on Russian formalism. As Todorov points out, it was Novalis who stressed the idea of intransitivity. "It was indeed Novalis and not Jakobson who defined poetry as an 'expression for expression's sake.'" Todorov, p. 273.

[47] Lawrence Gowing, "The Logic of Organized Sensations," in *Cézanne: The Late Work* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1977), p. 56.

is no figure that is not always already taken up within the texture that constitutes it). But at the same time a formalist approach provides us with the means to account for the status of figuration at that historical moment where we see the illusionist program at once triumphant (Gérome, Meissonier) and experiencing its own deconstruction.

The concept of *figure* is not tied to the well-worn antagonism between realism and abstraction. Whether iconic or not (like geometrical figures), it forms part of a higher stage of the work. Some will see, for example, a figurative poverty in the way in which Gauguin transports the same motif (woman in the waves, couple facing each other) across all sorts of techniques: engraving, painting, pottery, bas-relief. The formalist, however, will see here the ordered declension of a graphic schema, constant throughout a variety of materials that, by turns, *produce* it. The artwork would thus be less the graphic schema itself than its own declension. The same goes for Gauguin's iconographic "borrowings" from the civilizations of the East and Far East (postcards, photos of Borobudur, etc.). A formal analysis would not in any way see in it an unspeakable predatory move at the expense of universal heritage but rather the invention of a proto-collage the methodology of which Gauguin was moreover to make quite blatantly explicit when he painted *Still Life with Horse's Head* (ca. 1886), a work that shows a combination of heterogeneous objects placed side by side. We can also cite other "collage" forms, such as the wood reliefs of 1890 (*Be in Love*, etc.)—a coalescence, therefore, of antagonistic spaces with disparate scales and transgressed compartments.

The formalist method considers with equanimity all of the factors: textural, chromatic, figurative, etc., and designates as artwork the variety of their arrangements. The history of art is nothing but the way in which any given factor (or group of factors) becomes—according to relations of co-existence, fusion, subordination, etc.—dominant, before ceding its place to others (only to arise again later into prominence, in a new combination).

Let us observe, for example, how the various factors that make up the work circulate within the art of Puvis de Chavannes, one of the founding fathers of symbolism. A specialist in mural painting, Puvis takes account of the presence of the architecture in his treatment of surfaces. The frontality and breadth of the wall are reflected in the figural arrangement: contraction of perspective, simplification of the characters, majestic composition, vast areas of flat color, etc. "If he composes in light tones, he tells us, it is because the decoration must harmonize with the stone, and where he is working, the dominant shade is light."[48] We are here in the presence of a first combination of factors: the wall conditions the economy of the figured scene, and even its chromatic scheme.

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[48] Aimée Brown-Price in the catalogue *Puvis de Chavannes*, published on the occasion of the retrospective exhibition of 1976–77 at the Grand Palais in Paris. I am following, step by step, this author's thoroughly well-documented study.

A second combination is as follows: Puvis did not paint alfresco but rather on large canvases that were then affixed to the wall. According to his follower Paul Baudouin,

> . . . for his large compositions, and even for his paintings and studies, he used only canvas primed with plaster and glue, so as to have the matte look that, along with his fine painterly skill, gave to his decorations the appearance almost of frescoes.[49]

Puvis *feigned* alfresco painting. He *copied* the grain of the wall, the mortar (slaked lime, sand), bringing them, in some way, to the *forefront* of the canvas. There is an illusionistic practice, a trompe-l'œil, that comes to be combined with a frontal, decorative, and *abstracticizing* aesthetics. This is a typical case of "formal" displacement: the unity of the work as a "dynamic integrity" has forced the denaturing, and the erasure, of a medium traditionally devoted to the brilliances and ambiguities of substance.

There remains one further arrangement: Puvis's frontal and monumental aesthetic is transferred unchanged to his easel paintings. A correlation is then made to occur between mural painting and a movable support. By a series of successive mutations, the characteristics of the fresco, the first model, are displaced onto a new ground. The combinatory relation of physical wall and flat style of painting is abandoned, but the manner persists. The absent wall continues to work the painting. The result is a completely new "form," one that was, moreover, rather badly received by his contemporaries but that was to have its now-recognized influence on Seurat and Gauguin. "His handling of the pigmentary paste is looking to render neither values nor volumes; rather, on the contrary, it increasingly masks them."[50] This was a *textural* uniformity that was soon to make its appearance in Seurat as a *gestural* unity: it is the regular application of the "small dots" that gives to *La Grande Jatte* the material evenness of the work. This is a surface effect that Denis brings to the fore in one of his own paintings from 1891. And a note from Fénéon referring to such works: "As a means of execution, a *pointillis* (a brocade of dots) that he stitches onto a flat surface, in order to give the painting a sort of epidermic life."[51] We find the same "pointillis" yet again in Vuillard (*The Stevedores,* 1890)—but this time by means of regular dabs devoid of any denotation, decorative strokes that anticipate the cubist use of the "petit point" and even of the "papier collé" (pasted paper).

Elsewhere, it was to be the technical procedures, the accidents, and the resistances of the material that, far from being erased, were to become the dominant features of the completed work. Leo Steinberg has shown how Rodin (*La Terre,*

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[49] Paul Baudouin, *Gazette des Beaux-Arts,* May 1935. Cited in *Le Petit Journal des grandes expositions* 41 (1976), p. 1.

[50] Aimée Brown-Price, p. 14.

[51] Fénéon, "Quelques peintres idéistes," p. 200.

1884; *Figure volante, L'Homme qui marche,* etc.) deliberately allowed the textural imperfections of the clay to remain: cracks, marks left by wet rags, little pellets, and knife gashes to be cast in the final bronze.[52] The principal agency here is no longer the academic referent, in its integrity, but the very life of the material and the manual investment that it demands. The contingencies of execution, automatic actions, and chance events are raised to the register of expression. Note also how Gauguin, in his reliefs, lets appear the grain of the wood and the chisel grooves so as to produce what Christopher Gray has called a certain "woodenness" that is inseparable from the figures. The surface is not completely covered by the paint, in a way that would hide the tactile components, but rather "stained," impregnated with color.

In the same way, in Munch and sometimes in Lautrec, the brush only lazily accompanies the flow of diluted pigment. Like rain on a windowpane, rivulets take form, transgressing the contour of the figures, giving to the latter, held in the interweaving that passes through them, a ghostlike appearance. And finally, we have Vuillard, who does not paint women under the lamp so much as the becoming-smudge of slowly eroding characters. They are almost abolished—but in this "almost" lies all the charm—within the scab growth that surrounds them. In 1893, Geffroy said of Vuillard's painting that it "makes one think of the woolly underside of a tapestry." The economy of the surface resides neither in the arrangement of the figural scene nor in any compositional design, but in the edge-to-edge of smudged and vermiculated areas that seem like so many fragments of wallpaper, whose coherence is to be found only in the color order (color contrast, but also, and quite often, the diffuse reign of a dominant color).

We could cite here an infinite number of combinations in which, at various stages of the pictorial structure, heterogenous elements coexist. Good painting is always *aporetic,* and its capacity to appear, to "hold together" in space, and to face us "openly" derives in all cases from the contradictions that it shows. Conflicts, therefore, that hold the canvas in "tension," delivering it to us as a living thing that is always at work. Yet these conflicts are themselves the projected image of a physical tussle: the artist at grips with, and in the grip of, the material he works. I have summarized earlier the conception of image production that was prevalent in the classical world and in the Renaissance, namely, the notion of an inert support onto which is inscribed a design, already formed within the mind of the painter and that the latter has only to execute (and I recalled that, in 1890, Aurier, as apostle of his "ideism," fully accepted this notion). In this regard, both with classicism and "ideism," we are on the side of what A. W. Schlegel, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, identified as *mechanical form* in a famous distinction:

> Form is mechanical when, through external force, it is imparted to any material merely as an accidental addition, without reference to its quality; as, for example, when we give a particular shape (*Gestalt*) to a soft mass so that it may remain the same after its induration.

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[52] Leo Steinberg, *Other Criteria: Confrontations with Twentieth-Century Art* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), p. 393. For more on the same theme, see Rosalind Krauss, *Passages in Modern Sculpture* (New York: Viking Press, 1977), chapter 1.

Over against the mechanical, Schlegel placed the "organic form," born from within the thing (or work), determined by the materiality, the "hidden essence" of the thing (or work).[53]

If we carry this over into the field of painting, this opposition between the "mechanical" and the "organic" can inform us about the difference between the *projective* and the *inductive* types of surface, i.e., between support and *subjectile* (a term much appreciated by Fénéon). Seen through the lens of the "organic," an artwork emerges simultaneously from a *project* of inscription and the *process* of this inscription in contact with the resistance of a substance. How does the particular substance yield itself *relative* to the artist's intention? How does the artistic intention adapt itself as it takes on form? (Picasso: "You have to have an idea of what you are going to do, but it must be a vague idea.") Questions such as these assume a new posture on the part of the artist towards the work. We might call this *proclivity* (a state of leaning over). It is not the same as *astasia* (collapse, inability to stand up). It implies the body's negotiation faced with the challenge of its own falling down. And, in fact, this has been, since Delacroix, the posture of the modern artist, aware that all thought of mastery or control is constantly subverted by experience: the work, in its gestation, returns back upon the subject (the artist) who is attempting to arouse it into existence. This is a subject, therefore, that is destabilized, in a state of *mise en abîme*, a stranger to the Cartesian certainty of a freely choosing will. It is precisely this uncertainty and struggle, this fragility, this subject in perpetual crisis, that Aurier's dogmatism utterly rejects. How can we reconcile with Aurier's system Gauguin's stupefaction, as expressed thus in a letter to Sérusier: "My paintings frighten me so much that I can't talk about what I'm doing here. People will never accept them" (March 23, 1892)?

What Aurier refused to see, Nietzsche, in texts that were exactly contemporary to his, proclaimed loudly. As is well known, a theory of art is woven into the Nietzschean project of the inversion of all values. Art is the site where this inversion is tested and deployed. Against Plato, "the greatest enemy of art which Europe has produced," against "the ascetic ideal," and denouncing philosophers with their "quiet and submissive internal organs,"[54] and the "fits of the vapours that are 'idealism'!"(1888, 14[37]).[55] Nietzsche claims that art is "the great stimulant of life, a rush of life, a will to live" (1888, 15[10]).[56] He accords supreme value to the instinctual, to the profusion of drives: "bubbling and brimming over all limits. [. . .] Art reminds us of states of animal vigor, it's on the one hand a surplus and overflow of flourishing corporeality into the world of images and wishes . . . " (1887, 9[102]).[57] This movement of expansion and distension does not take place without a deflation of consciousness: "In the tremendous multiplicity of what happens within an organism, the part we become conscious of is merely a little corner" (1887, 11[83]).[58] Thus art—Nietzsche returns here to classical themes—is "prefigured" at once by the (Apollonian) *dream* with its upsurging of uncensored images, "a pleasure in seeing forms, in making forms"(1888, 14[18]), and by (Dionysian) *intoxication*: "A reaching out beyond personhood, beyond everyday life, society, reality, as an abyss of forgetting, a passionate and painful overflowing into darker, fuller, less stable conditions" (1888, 14[14]).

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[53] A. W. Schlegel, *A Course of Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature,* trans. J. Black, cited in Todorov, pp. 179–80. Translation slightly modified.

[54] Friedrich Nietzsche, "The Genealogy of Morals," in *The Essential Nietzsche,* trans. Helen Zimmern (New York: Chartwell Books, 2017), pp. 316 and 279.

[55] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Writings from the Late Notebooks,* ed. Rüdiger Bittner, trans. Kate Sturge (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 244.

[56] Translator's note: For the quotations from Nietzsche's Unpublished Fragments, I have included published translations where possible. In all other cases, I am grateful to Peter Schwartz for help with translating the original German.

[57] Nietzsche, *Writings,* p. 160.

We see here a dual explosive splintering: on the one hand, the image's emergence compromises bodily control, muddying and undoing the body's unity: "An image arising within us already seems like a movement of the limbs—a certain suspension of the will" (1888, 14[170]); on the other hand, the artist, through his adhesion—or, better, his adhering—to the object (the pleasure object), grasps the various components of the work in their autonomy: "the artist gradually begins to love, for their own sake, the means by which the state of intoxication makes itself known: the extreme delicacy and splendor of the color, the clarity of the line, the nuance of the *tone*—that which is distinct, whereas usually, in what is normal all distinction is lacking" (1888, 14[47]). It is the artist's intoxication that makes this splintering possible, and the rupture, in its turn, produces more intoxication: "All distinct things, all nuances, to the extent that they recall to mind the extreme intensifications of force produced by intoxication, retroactively awaken this feeling of intoxication. The effect of artworks is to *arouse the state in which one creates works of art,* to intoxicate . . . " (1888, 14[47]).

For Nietzsche, the mirror image of the gaze's work of diffraction is the split subject. A subject, therefore, that is perforated, floating, unfocused, polycentric, always in excess of its take on the world, and shot through with regional passions. And yet to name the subject is already to say too much, since he writes that there is no "metaphysical subject" but rather "a millionfold growth, with initiatives of its own and half its own" (1887, 11[111]).[59] Not the body as the site where tensions would show themselves, but tensions that make bodies: "our subconscious world of servant organs."[60] And, as he writes in *The Will to Power*, "The assumption of one single subject is perhaps unnecessary; perhaps it is just as permissible to assume a multiplicity of subjects, whose interaction and struggle is the basis of our thought and our consciousness in general."[61]

We must put Nietzsche's voice, with all its violence, tempestuousness, and imperiousness, alongside the symbolist moment, because Nietzsche is articulating, loudly and clearly, what was latent, i.e., what idealism was hiding and repressing, and this was the place of the body and the unconscious in human destiny. Nietzsche announces the crisis of the subject—nexus of organs, polymorphically perverse—caught up in the economy of desire (this was the moment in history when Freud, as a student of Charcot, was at the Salpêtrière psychiatric hospital).[62] An entire image of the human self was being shattered, and we can see Aurier's lamentations, the tears he sheds for it, in notes (published posthumously) that are quite symptomatic, in which he calls plainly for precisely the "ascetic ideal" that Nietzsche denounces as a rule of life:

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[58] Nietzsche, *Writings*, p. 214.

[59] Ibid., p. 221.

[60] Nietzsche, "The Genealogy of Morals," p. 233.

[61] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage Books, 1968), Book III (485), p. 270.

> The only way to understand a work of art is to become its lover. This is possible, since a work is a being that has a soul, and that shows it in a language that can be learned. It is easier even to feel true LOVE for a work of art than for a woman, since in a work of art the material scarcely exists, and it will never make the love degenerate into sensuality. (1892b [711])

This text is unique in its frankness. An intense work of sublimation operates here a dual movement: the world (women, the senses) is rejected in favor of painting, and then painting, in its turn, is voided of all sensuality:

> The sensualism of this century has unlearned us of how to see in woman anything other than a block of flesh for the satisfaction of our material desires. The love of a woman is no longer permitted us. This century's skepticism has unlearned us of seeing in God anything other than a nominal abstraction that is perhaps non-existent. The love of God is no longer permitted us. Only one love is still allowed, and this is for works of art. Let us throw ourselves upon this raft of salvation. Let us become mystics of art. (Ibid., p. 711)

Mystics—we are obviously very far here from Gauguin's "rutting eye." Had Aurier lived longer, the discord would certainly have broken out.[63] His programmatic insistence was not limited to recommending this or that category of "subject"; it failed completely to see, indeed it censored, what appears to us today to have been the major innovation of the time, namely, the physical investment of the artist, his immediate and *direct* confrontation with the material of the work (Aurier writes, " . . . in the work of art, the material scarcely exists . . . " [ibid., p. 711]).

Let us take but one example: the sixty or so ceramics (although the artist preferred to call them "sculptures")[64] that Gauguin made during the years 1886–87. They figure among the founding works of modern visual art (Aurier noted, "How can one explain, finally, the strange, barbaric, and savage ceramics, in which, sublime potter that he is, he has kneaded more of the soul than the clay?" [1891, p. 374]. Before Gauguin, vases were usually given a rough shape on the pottery wheel, cast in plaster molds, and finally retouched and decorated. Gauguin's shattering innovation was to take hold of the clay itself with his bare hands and to use his fingers to shape the various bits, strips, and coils of wet clay that he then added to one another freely, following the lead of his hands as they explored, felt out, and dreamt. It was all in the touch—the palms of the hands and the pads of the fingers slipping over the viscous substance. What Gauguin wanted above all was "to replace the potter at his wheel with intelligent hands that can communicate to the vase the life of a figure," and "to give to the art of ceramics new momentum for the creation of new forms made with the hands."[65]

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[62] See Georges Didi-Huberman, *Invention of Hysteria: Charcot and the Photographic Iconography of the Salpêtrière* (1982), (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004).

[63] The discord was to surface ten years later, exploding like a time bomb. In his letter to Monfreid of November 1901, Gauguin was to write: "You know what I think of all these false ideas of symbolism, both in literature and painting, so it's useless to repeat it." They are, he says, "lucubrations of literary critics." *The Letters of Paul Gauguin to Georges-Daniel de Monfreid*, pp. 149–50.

[64] See Merete Bodelsen, *Gauguin's Ceramics in Danish Collections* (Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1960), p. 16.

There is nothing here in the way of a model, design, or composition that precedes the gesture that seems to draw directly upon magical and primitive sources.[66] Dwelling places, strange movements, funereal, gaping openings, "swollen, budding shapes, covered in plant-like protuberances."[67] The hand elicits and at once blindly submits to the uprising of the substance—the local passions of the material. Gauguin described it thus in a letter to Bernard dated June 1890:

> I seek the character in every lump of matter. Now the character of stoneware pottery is the emotion of the furnace, and the figure calcined in this inferno expresses, I think, this character pretty distinctly, just as an artist imagined by Dante in his vision of the Inferno. Poor devil driven in upon himself in order to endure suffering.[68]

The metaphorical acceleration from "furnace" to "inferno" in this statement is decisive. This is the artist as calcinated, identified with his object, and becoming himself the subject of the combustion he sets off in an uncontrollable movement of empathy, the portent of a radical investment—the splitting apart of the subject by the Will. So was Gauguin a Nietzschean? Among the lightning-shocks, invective, and debris of Nietzsche's breathless thoughts, one might indeed believe one was seeing, in counter-relief, something like the painter Gauguin. Were they not, each one of them, desirous of "awakening the *faded ideals* in their merciless severity and brutality, as the most magnificent monsters they are . . . "?[69] But the same Gauguin could also write, in a letter to Monfreid dated August 1901, "The critics say stupid things. [. . .] So many fools who wish to analyze our pleasures—unless they think it's our job to make them cum."[70]

—Translated from the French by Nicholas Huckle

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[65] Gauguin's statements are cited in Jean d'Albis, *Ernest Chaplet* (Paris: Les Presses de la Connaissance, 1976).

[66] Rosalind Krauss makes this observation in *Passages*, p. 34. See also Henri Focillon's pages on Gauguin in his "In Praise of Hands" [1934] in *The Life of Forms in Art*, trans. S. L. Faisan, Jr. (New York: George Wittenborn, Inc., 1948), pp. 65–78.

[67] Cachin, p. 49.

[68] Paul Gauguin, *Letters to his Wife and Friends*, ed. Maurice Malingue, trans. Henry J. Stenning (Boston: MFA Publications, 2003), pp. 144–45.

[69] Fragment 10[24] in *Unpublished Fragments (Summer 1886–Fall 1887)*, trans. George H. Leiner (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press), e-book, np.

[70] *The Letters of Paul Gauguin to Georges-Daniel de Monfreid*, p. 143.

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Ointments, Makeup, Pollen*

JEAN CLAY

translated by JOHN SHEPLEY

> *A few solitary flowers stood up*
> *in long flowerbeds and in a*
> *frightened voice said: Red.*
> —Rilke, *The Notebooks of Malte*
> *Laurids Brigge*

Manet does not have a style, he has all of them. "Imitator," *pasticheur*—the reproach echoes throughout the 1860s in Thoré, Mantz, or Gautier.[1] Manet treats the artistic heritage the way Walter Benjamin's *flâneur* handles merchandise. The Louvre is a *passage,* a market stand, where the painter strikes his bargain. The history of art is on sale, the past is flattened, desacralized, manipulated, instrumentalized—the end of *aura.* We are no longer in a vein of reverent quotation, but of tapping and recycling. Manet skims from anywhere—he reverses, assembles, tinkers. In this wholly prosaic rapport with tradition, the history of art—its institutions and rules—is denied the silent authority that it had exercised on every young painter since his first stroke of the brush.

The flattening entails the end of hierarchies and schools, the end of the great canonical antitheses (Poussin versus Rubens, Ingres versus Delacroix).

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[1] Péladan, in a text that moreover contains pertinent remarks on Manet's practices, extols "his excellent pastiches and daring *crépons,*" adding that "half of Manet's canvases are slavish copies of the masters" (Joséphin Péladan, "Le procédé de Manet," *L'Artiste,* February 1884, quoted in Pierre Courthion, *Manet,* II, Geneva, 1953).

According to Degas, "Edouard himself, though he prided himself on slavishly copying nature, was the most mannered painter in the world, never making a brushstroke without thinking of the masters . . ." (Paul Valéry, *Degas, danse, dessin,* Paris, 1965 [1938], p. 201).

By drawing simultaneously on Titian, Raphael, Hals, Velázquez, Ribera, Zurburán, Murillo, Le Nain, Watteau, Goya, Géricault (and countless others, the list of whom grows longer every day thanks to the ferocious effort of the iconographers); by borrowing from Japanese art; and by seeking inspiration in photography, Manet subverts the notions of linear continuity, progress, and source. We are faced with the paradox of an oeuvre that, at the very moment when it becomes saturated with references, suspends the possibility of a genealogy of forms. It is precisely because he quotes—and by his mode of quotation—that Manet breaks with the fiction of an art history always already grounded in precedent. In squandering the past, he only adds to the uncertainty of its future: all teleology collapses in a chaos of references, into which meaning, plan, and program sink as well (the Enlightenment is still present in Goya, as is the democratic ideal in Courbet).

"You don't create a book with books, and you don't create a painting with paintings."[2] There is no better expression than this statement by Castagnary of the abyss that separates the goals of the naturalists (he invented the term in 1863) from Manet's practice. Castagnary does not possess the theoretical means to make a distinction between the eclecticism reigning in the Salon and the enterprise of a man who, by the juxtaposition of fragments taken from here and there in the history of art, puts considerable strain on the formative rules of the painting of his time. He does not discern what it is in Manet that derives from an ambition other than reproducing "the life of the countryside" and "the life of cities." He finds him on occasion "more fanciful than observant, more whimsical than powerful" (1869).[3] But how is one to integrate into the documentary and mimetic ideology of naturalism such operations as these: in order to paint *La Pêche* (1860-61), Manet mingles, reverses, and synthesizes four paintings by Carracci and Rubens.[4] In *The Old Musician* (1862), the figures are borrowed respectively from the engraver Schlesinger, Velázquez, Watteau, and Manet himself (*The Absinthe Drinker*)—while the body of the central figure is inspired by a marble statue of the third century B.C. representing Chrysippos, and the head by a gypsy encountered in the Batignolles quarter (the vegetation occupying the left corner of the work comes from a lithograph by Nanteuil after Velázquez's *Drinkers*).[5]

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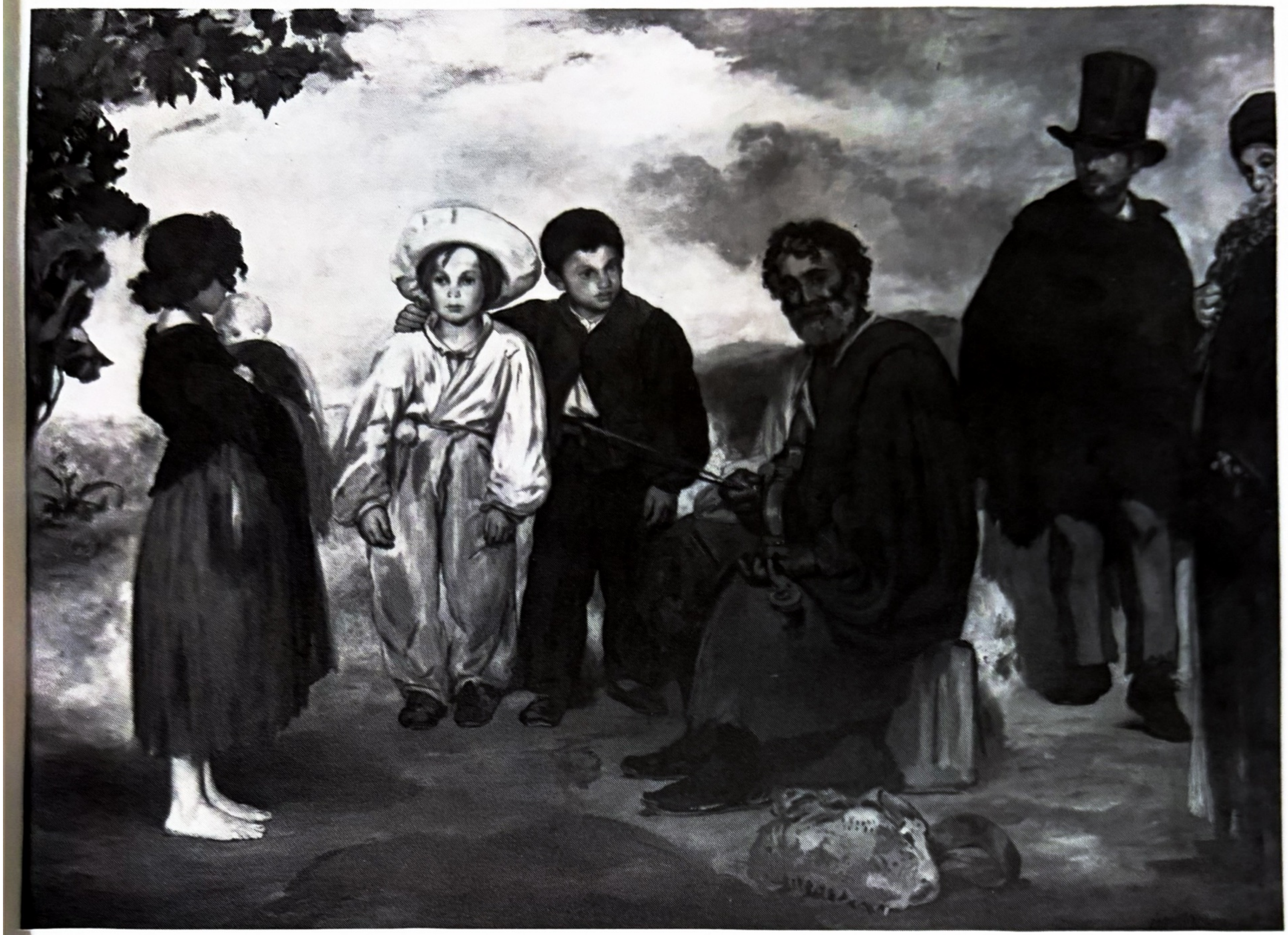
[2] Jules Antoine Castagnary, *Salon de 1864*. Quoted in Michael Fried, "Manet's Sources, Aspects of His Art, 1859-1865," *Artforum*, vol. VII, no. 7 (March 1969), p. 74, note 141.

Castagnary's remark echoes melodiously in the other, more famous one by Mallarmé, which overlaps and cancels it: "But, Degas, you don't make verses with ideas. . . . You make them with words" (quoted in Valéry, p. 140).

[3] Quoted in John Rewald, *The History of Impressionism,* New York, 1961, p. 224.

[4] Charles Sterling and Margaretta Salinger, *French Paintings* (catalogue), New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1967, vol. III, p. 26.

[5] See Alain de Leiris, "Manet, Guéroult and Chrysippos," *The Art Bulletin,* vol. XLVI (September 1964), p. 401 ff. And for a more recent discussion, see Theodore Reff, *Manet and Modern Paris,* Washington, D.C., National Gallery of Art, 1982, pp. 174 ff.



Edouard Manet. The Old Musician. *1862.*

Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe (1863) *condenses* two famous works: the composition is from Raphael (it is taken from the *Judgment of Paris,* as engraved by Raimondi) and the theme from Titian (*Fête Champêtre*). Manet is not content to borrow this or that gesture, type, or drapery—he appropriates the whole group. Note that he does not depart from the engraving; he paints a kind of "tableau vivant": his brother Gustave, the sculptor Leenhoff, and a model mimic Raphael's figures. The classical skeleton is clothed with modern flesh. Manet superimposes historical reference and present-day subject. He makes a nature out of culture.[6]

Smooth and compact, the nudes in *Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe* and *Olympia* stand out in a provocative way against a more "pictorial" context.[7] Precise linearity of contour, uniform lighting of bodies (little or no shadow): enough modeling to avoid the (Ingresque) working sketch; enough drawing to isolate the figure in the painting. The influence of photography has been seen here—less perhaps of photomontage (already frequent in the 1850s, with its awkward qualities and disconnected lighting effects)[8] than of the semi-porn photo—"academics," "artistic poses"—which becomes widespread in these same years, and available to painters and collectors.[9] Gerald Needham considers the "pornographic" documents of the period (at which people peered in the stereoscope) as an important source for *Olympia*.[10] He mentions a number of contemporaneous pictures that combine a setting borrowed from painting (that of the odalisque) and a less than ideal nude who stares boldly at the spectator. "By emphasizing the angularity of the human body," writes Needham, "[Manet] knew that he could give *Olympia* that immediacy and reality that so startled the people who saw it." The bulge of the kneecap (criticized by classical painters, as by Gérôme and the eclectics), the silhouetting, the steady lighting, the haunting stare of the "bestial Vestal" (Valéry) can be said to have been transposed from photography. Victorine would appear to be all the more shocking in that she forms a blot on a background that rejects her, just as a reclining, unclothed model forms a strange blot against the cardboard decor of a photographer's studio. Manet would thus have assumed the violence of this "real-effect" that was still disconcerting for people of the Second Empire.[11] In some way, what he painted was not Victorine Meurent but her photograph, not her image but a reproduction of it—in accordance with the code for pornographic albums of the period (likewise Warhol and Lichtenstein paint not objects but what is perceived of them in the ebb and flow of the mass media). Thrust to the front of the stage, restored to the status of an erotic instrument, Victorine is obscene; but this much-denounced obscenity lies neither in the supposed "professional" coldness of the model, nor in the otherwise conventional treatment of the nude; it is due to the integration of a figurative practice foreign to painting. The photograph contaminates the painted image—accelerating here again what Walter Benjamin called the decline of the aura. The *condensation* of various paintings would be completed by another synthesis: between two dissimilar modes of figurative representation.

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[6] Françoise Cachin, in the catalogue of the recent Manet exhibition at the Grand Palais in Paris and the Metropolitan Museum in New York, speaks specifically of "tableau vivant": "Manet passes from the object of reference—Raphael's nymph—to a particular model, whom he directs to imitate, as it were, the classical pose. He reverses the operation to be performed in the studio according to school doctrine, and transforms the ideal into the real" (*Manet,* Paris and New York, 1983, p. 170).

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[7] In the sense of *malerisch* ("painterly"), as opposed to "linear." Manet shows no "concern for the envelope" (to use a term of the period). Compare with Titian's *Fête Champêtre* and *Venus of Urbino,* or Goya's *Maja desnuda,* "models" for the artist, where the bodies share in the atmospheric continuity.

On the other hand, the watercolor on the same theme, contemporaneous but later (*Manet* catalogue, no. 67), is like a "critical reading" of the canvas: a setting whose spatial ambiguities anticipate Cézanne, the merging of Olympia with the broad clear area of the bedclothes.

[8] See Robert A. Sobieszek, "Composite Imagery and the Origin of Photomontage," *Artforum,* vol. XVII, nos. 1-2 (September and October 1978).

[9] Baudelaire points out its success in his *Salon of 1859*: "Shortly thereafter, thousands of eager eyes were glued to the viewing holes of the stereoscope as though to the garret windows of eternity. The love of obscenity, which is bedded as deeply in the natural heart of man as his love for himself, was not about to let slip such a fine opportunity for self-satisfaction."

[10] Gerald Needham, "Manet, Olympia and Pornographic Photography," in *Woman as Sex Object,* New York, 1972, p. 83.

[11] An intrusive violence that might be compared as gesture with Juan Gris's introduction of a mirror into a painting.

In the recent *Manet* catalogue, p. 179, Françoise Cachin publishes an example of the "art photo" contemporaneous with *Olympia*.

At the level of "devices" (to use the Russian formalists' term) that turn Manet's efforts into work *about* painting, one should mention—in addition to appropriation, inversion, and condensation—a tendency temporally, sequentially, to decline (in the grammatical sense) a given visual idea. This diachronic development leads him to confront, within the economy of a series, a constant element with one or more variations. Here the painting, in many cases, is a "weak unity" (the expression is used by Michel Foucault in connection with books). As later with Gauguin, any production of an image, for Manet, is capable of being declined through a range of media: from drawing to engraving (itself developed in several states), from oils to lithography. We will see a number of examples of this later on. As Duret recalls, Manet often executed watercolors based on his canvases.[12] Tabarant writes that he would sometimes do his pastels on Holland paper, then repeat them on prepared canvas—while to us they seem the miraculous fruit of the moment.[13] Commissioned to depict the singer Faure as Hamlet (1867), he did two portraits, the poses almost identical, on canvases of the same size (both signed): the first canvas is a web of quick, nervous strokes that pare away the jagged silhouette of the baritone—who seems to disintegrate in the theatrical sparkle that produces him—the second is a dull and somber mass on a neutral background. Two styles. Almost two painters.

Certain figures also persist, whose strength and frequency can be compared, in some cases, to an effect of traumatic images. It is not a matter of indifference that the crowd watching the execution of Maximilian, even though it comes from Goya, is the same one as in *The Dead Toreador* (before being cut). And that the firing squad that executes communards in *The Barricade* is the very same one, reversed, that shot the emperor of Mexico. Or that the body lying at the foot of the barricade in *Civil War* is that of the *The Dead Toreador* (which, according to the logic of recycling already described, is inspired by the *Dead Soldier* long attributed to Velázquez, as well as by one version or another of Gérôme's *Dead Caesar*).

There is a similar persistence of a graphic element—or a portion of layout: the line that winds across the whole breadth of *Little Cavaliers* (Manet's copy of a supposed painting by Velázquez, c. 1856) reemerges to divide the dancers in *The Spanish Ballet* (1862). The same horizontal development of a line, but softer, controls the crowd in *Music in the Tuileries* (1862) or *Masked Ball at the Opera* (1873). Another, more angular line distributes the irregular group in *The Old Musician* or the firing squad in *Maximilian.* Other echoes, belonging to the artist's unconscious: the bottom of the dress in *Jeanne Duval* (1862) recurs in the parterre in the *Exposition Universelle* (1867), the pilings in Venice (1875) in the trees in *Music in the Tuileries,* and the curve of the horizon in the landscapes and seascapes of the years 1860–70 in the rounded wall in *Maximilian,* and so on.

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[12] Théodore Duret, *Histoire d'Edouard Manet et de son oeuvre,* Paris, 1902, p. 134.

[13] Adolphe Tabarant, *Manet et ses oeuvres,* Paris, 1947, p. 445.

To generalize here about an oeuvre founded entirely on *willful discrepancy* would be to fall into a trap. Actually it is an indescribable oeuvre, one that constantly breaks the rules that it has just set for itself. One can say nothing about it—about its fabrication, its palette, its conceptions of perspective, its "backgrounds"—that is not immediately contradicted by this or that group of paintings. The notion of *style,* in the current sense,[14] loses all relevance, as do those of *developing* and *maturing.* Manet's oeuvre does not develop, it simply operates by displacement. It proceeds like the species according to Cuvier: by abrupt and catastrophic mutations. Here is an artist who simultaneously paints smoothly and distinctly (*In the Conservatory*) and *alla prima* (*Woman Reading*), in a gritty fashion (*Rochefort*), and a *tachiste* one (*Cabaner, Moore*). On one side he approaches Courbet, on the other de Kooning. Within the space of a few weeks he offers the *Dead Christ* and *Races at Longchamp* (1864), *Berthe Morisot with Hat, in Mourning* and *Masked Ball at the Opera* (1873). If one did not perceive correctly the kind of restless movement that runs throughout it, one would think that the recent retrospective at the Metropolitan was a group exhibition. This incongruity is unmatched until Picasso. Girodet, at the turn of the nineteenth century, in his singular and stubborn determination to "do something new" (neither David nor Ingres had any such aspiration), envisaged each of his paintings as an unprecedented attempt (within the framework of his own experiments). And indeed, if one excludes the portraits, his work is a combination of memorable endeavors that cannot be described in the same terms.

With Manet we are dealing with something else. There is repeated cleavage and conflict among the components of the painting. It is no longer a matter of painting masterpieces, or entities, but of introducing elements of torsion and contradiction. Of inventing painting while destroying it. A borderline art, always reactive, with no other aim than to place all tradition, even its own, in an untenable position. Here, in defiance of the law, a perverse component of painting is manifested that will be one of its moving forces until Robert

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[14] "By style is meant the constant form—and sometimes the constant elements, qualities, and expression—in the art of an individual or group" (Meyer Schapiro, "Style," in *Anthropology Today,* ed. A. L. Kroeber, Chicago and London, 1953).

Ryman.[15] How to produce discordances, pictorial aporias? How to constrain the forces contending before our eyes in the painting? Manet, by this reckoning, would not be a painter, but discrepancy at work in painting. And this may have been his—albeit unformulated—program.[16]

For example, the most glaring discrepancy is between the play of illusionist depth and the demands of the surface. There is discrepancy between the *trace* (which belongs to the gesture) and the *tracé* (which belongs to the sign). Discrepancy and incertitude, adroitly handled, between the *ébauche* (lack of fulfillment, incompleteness) and the *esquisse* (self-sufficient, worthy to be in a confrere's collection: *Claude Monet in His Studio,* Coll. Hammer). It all takes place, Hanson notes, as though Manet were "perversely avoiding the kind of aesthetic resolution which might endanger the vitality of his art."[17] Hence the anomalies, the oddities that still strike us today, and which in his time earned him the reputation of being eccentric and deliberately provoking, in the manner of Warhol: the two right feet of the *Absinthe Drinker,* Christ's wound on the wrong side, the guitar strummed with the left hand, the Mexican rifleman with white leggings, the impossible Paris of *The Burial,* the ghostly reflection in the mirror of the *Folies-Bergère,* and so forth.[18]

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One tries to grasp—beyond tactical considerations and those of the market—what it was that made it improbable that Manet would adhere to realism, naturalism, or impressionism, all of them schools endowed with a tyrannical and comprehensive doctrine, and even, in the last case, with a style. There is nothing about him to suggest the prolonged patience of a Monet, who proceeds from painting to painting, from series to series, from campaign to

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15. This would perhaps be the true mainstream (whose only law would be to question the law) and not the positivist reduction proposed by Greenberg under this sign. A mainstream that today takes second place with the uncritical reexamination of the neoprimitivism and expressionism of 1910–20. Manet's triumph at the Metropolitan coincides with his second death.

16. Let us note, however, the agreement of witnesses. To Antonin Proust in 1882: "It has been my ambition not to stand still, not to redo the next day what I did the day before, to be constantly inspired by a new aspect, to try to make a new note heard" (Antonin Proust, "L'art d'Edouard Manet," *Le Studio,* January 1901, quoted in Courthion, I, p. 39).

To Mallarmé: "No one should paint a landscape and a figure by the same process, with the same knowledge, or in the same fashion, [whereby Manet is only stating the method of his friend Fantin; but he adds:] nor what is more, even two landscapes or two figures. Each work should be a new creation of the mind" (Stéphane Mallarmé, "Les Impressionistes et Edouard Manet," *Gazette des Beaux-Arts,* November 1975). This text, mentioned in the *Oeuvres complètes,* Paris, 1945, p. 1624, was originally published as "The Impressionists and Edouard Manet," in *Art Monthly Review,* vol. I, no. 9 (September 30, 1876). The French manuscript was lost; thus the 1975 version is a translation from the English by Philippe Verdier.

17. Anne Coffin Hanson, *Manet and the Modern Tradition,* New Haven, 1977, p. 204.

18. Seymour Howard, "Early Manet and Artful Error: Foundations of Anti-illusion in Modern Painting," *Art Journal,* vol. XXXVII, no. 1 (Fall 1977), pp. 14–21.

campaign, attached for half a century to the intermittences of light.[19] For Manet, impressionism—the open air, the seizure of the moment, the comma-shaped brushstroke, the uniformity of texture, the interaction of colors in nature—is only a phase, albeit the last, in a career devoted to the questioning of painting in general. After all, if there is a Velázquez-Manet, a Hals-Manet, and an Ingres-Manet, there is also a Cézanne-Manet, a Lautrec-Manet, a Vuillard-Manet, a Matisse-Manet, . . . and the variety of effects in the sequence of his painting sufficiently expresses the potentialities of a process exacerbated more by dissatisfaction, an impulse to be different, than by any commitment to consistency.

Manet recognizes himself neither in the classical conception of composition (an order, an architecture),[20] nor in the romantic conception (an organic unity in movement). It is obvious that the notions of internal equilibrium and harmony scarcely interest him. He is indifferent to mastery of the surface, which presupposes a mastery over the world, and above all a subject set in its place and responsive to an arrangement that it completes and legitimizes. Manet seems struck by compositional "fatigue."[21] It is less a matter of challenging a certain order than of recording a distance from the very idea of pictorial coherence. "It" is not required to hold. Distortions, perspectives, aberrations, "slips" of the brush: we are entering a phase in which painting is ridding itself of the dream of self-sufficient totality on which it had been based since Alberti. And the appropriations from the masters, mentioned above, can also be understood as a critical interpretation, a way of destabilizing the steadfast serenity, the illusion of masterpieces.

Manet is generally content to borrow, as a convenience, formulas that have stood the test of time. Most of his paintings are simply centered in a manner that recalls Velázquez (*The Buffoon Pablillos*), Ribera (the effect of "photographic" suspense in *The Clubfoot*), Watteau (*Gilles*), etc.[22] Another formula, inherited from classicism and neoclassicism: the use of a vertical or horizontal strut (or both) to ensure the structural rigidity of the work and free the contrapuntal function of the figures and objects (*Olympia, Reading, Zola, The Balcony, In the Conservatory, Nana, The Bar at the Folies-Bergère,* etc.).

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[19] Even if at the end, with the *Waterlilies,* a threefold reversal takes place: topological (the central subject becomes the surroundings), effusive (symbolism, pantheism), and anti-object (Monet revisited by American abstraction).

As for the notion of *series* in the two painters: in Monet a series is created by variations of the referent (light); in Manet, by variations in treatment (of medium and style).

[20] "The disappearance of academic construction in painting is, on the contrary, the open path to the expression (thereby even to the exaltation) of the psychological processes most incompatible with social stability. This is what largely explains the lively reaction provoked for more than half a century by the progressive transformation of painting, till then characterized by a sort of hidden architectural skeleton" (Georges Bataille, *Oeuvres complètes,* Paris, 1970, vol. I, pp. 170–71).

[21] Zola in 1867: ". . . what is called composition does not exist for him." And Péladan, sixteen years later: "With no ideal, no composition, no emotion, no poetry, no drawing, incapable of composing a painting, Manet is only a painter and a painter of fragments" (Péladan, p. 160).

[22] Having finished the portrait of his friend Duret (1868, Petit Palais), Manet took it up again later, adding a stool and various colored objects. He changed nothing in the original layout. In the artist's eyes, the massive intervention of a new and brightly colored element does not disturb the arrangement of the work.

As though it were enough for him to spin out the centering principle laterally, Manet also sometimes adds rows of isolated figures, strangers to each other. Coexistence without connection—especially striking in *The Old Musician,* whose composite sources have been noted. This additive conception achieves a formal result in *The Beach at Boulogne* (1869), constructed in the manner of a musical stave. Alain de Leiris has shown that the painter had begun by drawing isolated pencil sketches from life, and later transcribed them as such, in the same sketchy style, over the whole breadth of the canvas (thereby raising the incompleteness of the sketch to the solemnity of the painting).[23] The diachronic character of the observations in *The Beach at Boulogne* is in some way compensated and restored by the wide intervals between the groups. It is these intervals that have the task of conveying—by the visual dispersion they impose on the gaze—the successive moments of observation. There is, as though by torsion, spatial resolution of a temporal fact.

The frieze construction—or that of superimposed bands—thus allows Manet to evade compositional hierarchies (just like his use of centering, which

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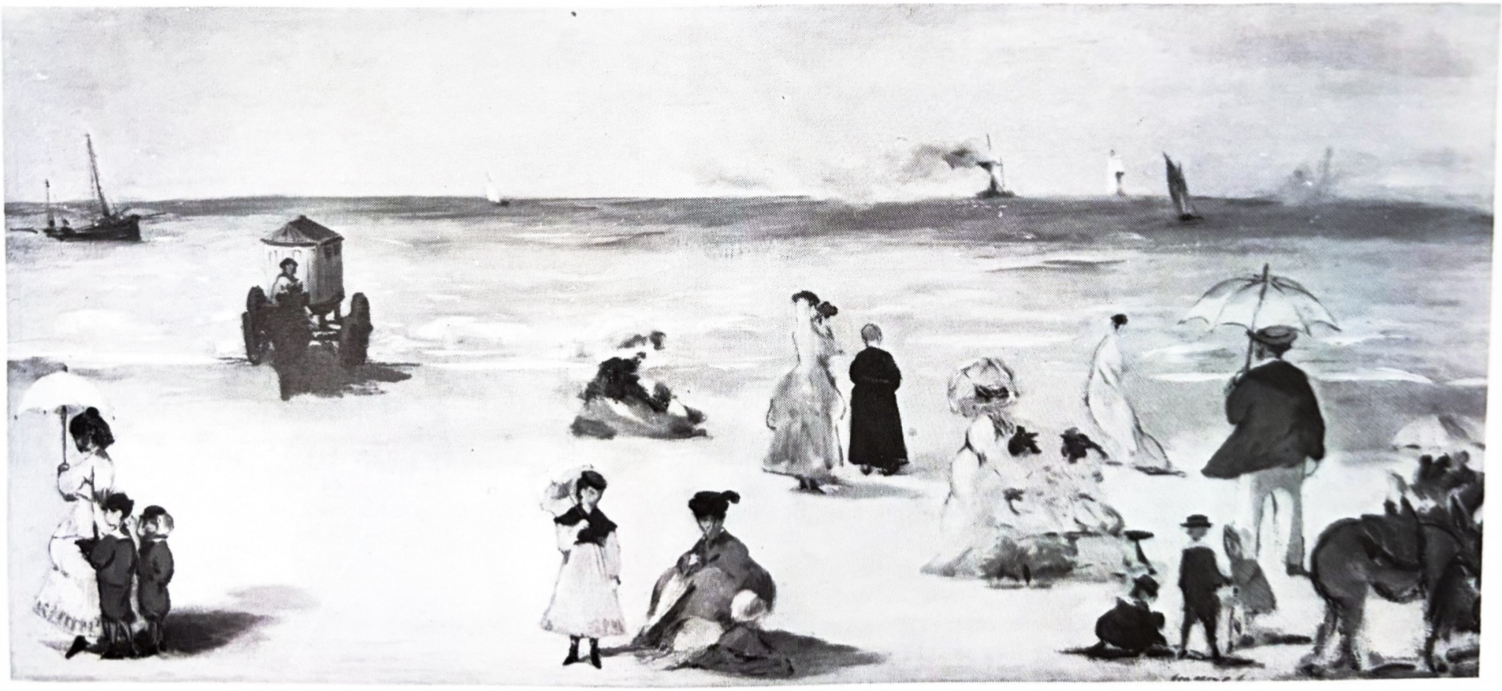
[23] Alain de Leiris, "Sur la plage de Boulogne," *Gazette des Beaux-Arts,* vol. LVII (1961), pp. 53–62, quoted in Hanson, p. 200.



Edouard Manet. The Beach at Boulogne. *1869. (Mr. and Mrs. Paul Mellon Collection, Upperville, Virginia.)*

works together with it).[24] This construction, when saturated, leads to the establishment of a compact curtain, of a mass that tends toward indistinctness; in *Music in the Tuileries* and *Masked Ball at the Opera* the gaps are not merely effaced, but muddled and camouflaged by the overlay of a colored web endowed, especially in the first case, with increasing autonomy.

It is for the same purpose that Manet adopts the opposite position, when, mindful of Japanese prints and Degas's contemporaneous concerns with cropping, he replaces a contemplative vision of the world (that of Corot) with a quick and violent depredation—"as of a scene," writes Mallarmé, "by a glance encompassed in a cupping of the hands." A mandorla that cuts off that other mandorla, the pupil of the eye.[25] Too close, too full, too rapid—the question is then no longer of an order, of an orthopedics of the gaze, but of a gust of visual material to which one yields, not in the presence of the subject but *before* its formulation—a flash already received beforehand *as painting*—and while the canvas is certainly not the clear transcription of this instantaneous seizure (several detailed sketches have sometimes preceded it), it retains the lesion of it, as a syncope (*Races at Longchamp, Folkestone, The Burial, Café-Concert*).

The art of the Far East was for Manet the means for pushing his visual paradoxes to the point of rupture. Sandblad dates this kind of forced trope from 1862: a *Spaniard* executed in the technique of a Japanese watercolor.[26] The same author, following many others, sees in *The Fifer* a Japanese silhouette pinned on a Velázquez background. As for *The Balcony,* the arrangement would be from Goya, the dresses and pots from Velázquez, and the frontal projection a transposition from the Ukiyo-e.

It is also Oriental perspective that inspires the overhang (the vantage point of the crow's nest) from which *The Battle of the Kearsarge* is organized (as well as *Asparagus* in the Louvre). For his *Mile V . . . in the Costume of an Espada,* Manet transposes Western modeling into an arrangement alien to it: "Many scenes of Japanese life present a ground plane which rises sharply to a high horizon on which distant objects in small scale seem to appear almost suspended behind the head or shoulders of standing figures."[27] By pinning like a butterfly his group of picador and bull (borrowed just as it is from Goya's *Tauromachia*) at two thirds of the height, Manet expresses as early as 1862 a cold indifference to any logical representation of space.[28] It is this that constitutes the painting's importance—beyond the fascination exercised by its monstrous aspect. And despite criticisms and sarcastic comments, the artist takes care not to change the organization when he uses it again for a watercolor and an engraving. In *Espada* (which is a masquerade besides), Manet does not substitute one system of perspective for another—as, for example, Gauguin and Van Gogh did at Les Alyscamps. He deliberately fabricates an antistructure, a monster unfit by its contradictions to provide a consistent transcription of empirical space. The stakes of painting are lowered on the canvas. The speculation that begins here opens directly on cubism (considered as a regulated opposition of mutually exclusive systems of projection).

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[24] Some have seen, among recent influences, those of newspaper illustrations, of Constantine Guys, or even of *Burial at Ornans,* highlight and scandal of the Salon of 1850–51 (cf., in particular, the preparatory charcoal drawing in the Besançon museum, *Courbet* catalogue, Réunion des Musées Nationaux, Paris, 1977, p. 227).

[25] Mallarmé, p. 152.

[26] Nils Gösta Sandblad, *Manet, Three Studies in Artistic Conception,* Lund, 1954, p. 82.

[27] Hanson, p. 188. The author shows a Japanese print whose conception is very close to that of *Espada.*

[28] Mallarmé on Manet and perspective: ". . . this wholly and artificially classical discipline, which makes our eyes the dupes of a civilized upbringing" (Mallarmé, p. 152).

After all, the tradition of composition could only lose much of its interest for a painter who tends to bypass the problem of the surface in order to reach, as though by a rotation of forty-five degrees, the category of the stratified, of layers, of thickness.[29] Examining Manet's paintings (the paintings, not photographs of them), one can see that the artist, as though seeking to overcome in the texture the old distinction between form and background, comes to *produce* out of it a new surface by weaving, overflowing, and overlapping. In Manet—and soon in Matisse—the "backgrounds" rise up, cross, create surfaces, and participate in the definition of the object. To take only one example: in the *Model of the Bar at the Folies-Bergère* (Dijon), the green and pink interweavings of pastel only partially cover the front of the jacket, exposing the undergarments like so many scabs, garlands of pale spots. Another reverse: the "background," very often painted last, clearly encroaches on the figure, which—a new aporia—all of a sudden finds itself emerging from a lower layer of paint (*Soap Bubbles,* 1867; *The Brunette with Bare Breasts,* 1872, etc.). Likewise, in *On the Beach* (1873), the yellow of the sand hems in the two seated figures. By executing his "backgrounds" later, Manet runs counter to empirical experience. Whatever stands out in the distance in a landscape is presented as closest to the spectator (Poussin, by his openings of light, frequently uses this method). One can observe that the overlapping of strata of color operates even in the details of works, and may involve more than two depths: in *Girl Serving Beer* (1879), the "background" covers the singer, who in her turn covers a woman spectator in the middle ground, and so forth. Another form: in *Music in the Tuileries,* the sinuous line that runs like a scar between the foliage and the crowd of strollers is made up of little piles of pigment—rolls, swellings—verging sometimes to one side, sometimes to the other.

Finally, it is by scraping his surface that Manet ensures the confusion of strata. Worked by a pointed object, the layers mingle in a fibrous, threadlike, inextricable texture. This practice also constitutes the originality of his lithographs. If one compares them with those of Fantin-Latour, one notes in the latter, of course, an abundant and daring use of the scraping tool. But when Fantin transgresses the limits of objects, the freedom of gesture remains subordinated to a mimetic conception—even when what it imitates, in its effusive fluidity, is the bursting of light, whose flow it espouses. By radicalizing the procedure, Manet changes its nature. *The Balloon,* contemporaneous with Fantin's *Embroiderers* (1862), is a texture of hatchings, of highly varied grays, obtained by going over the same lines, effacing them, repeating them, a harassment of the surface that muddles the indications of the figures. In the middle distance, the strollers are obliterated by the scraping tool and turned into lint, or straw. Delineations are effaced, and interest rests on that tension in which Manet holds us between the scene and its erasure, between the illusion of depth and the creation of a surface by the autonomous motion of the artist's hand.

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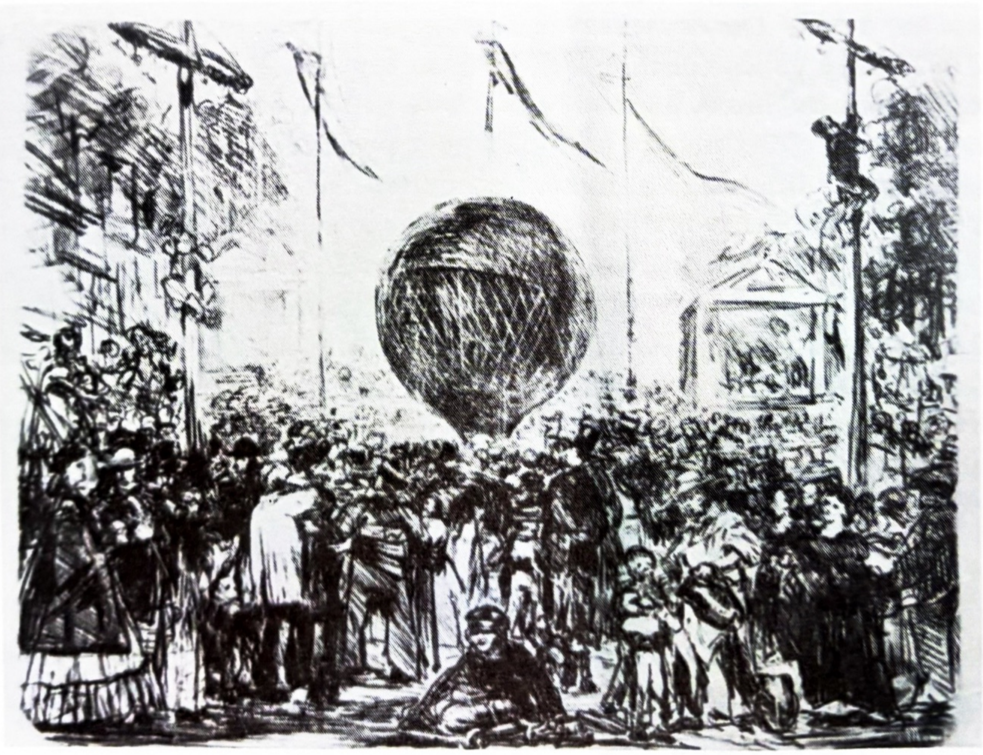
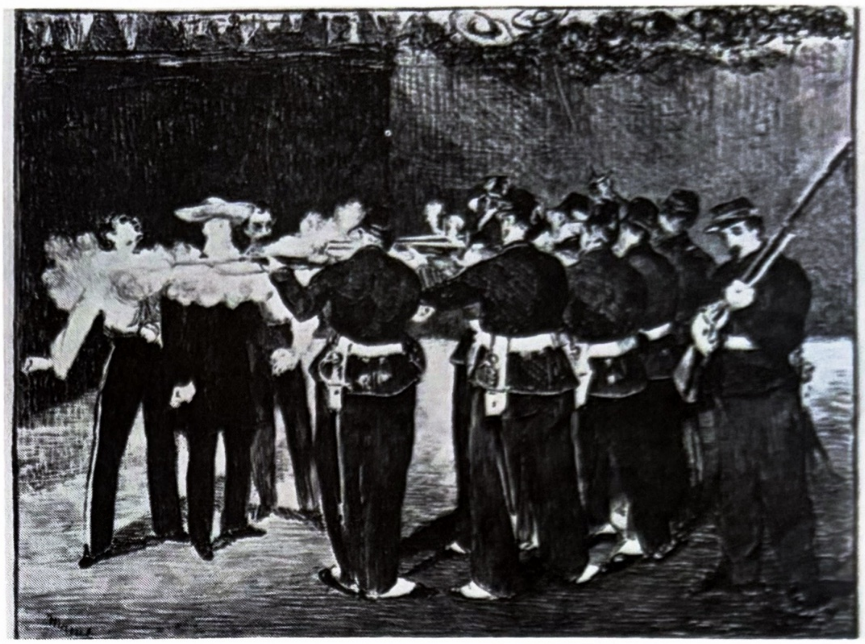
[29] Whereby he anticipates certain experiments of contemporary art. But one should put it the other way around: contemporary painting makes it possible to see what it was in his work that opened up the space of our modernity. For the question of thickness, see especially: Christian Bonnefoi, "A propos de la destruction de l'entité de surface," dossier Ryman, *Macula,* nos. 3-4 (1978), and "Entretien avec Christian Bonnefoi," *Macula,* nos. 5-6 (1979). See also J. Clay, "Pollock, Mondrian, Seurat: la profondeur plate," in *L'Atelier de Jackson Pollock,* Paris, 1982.

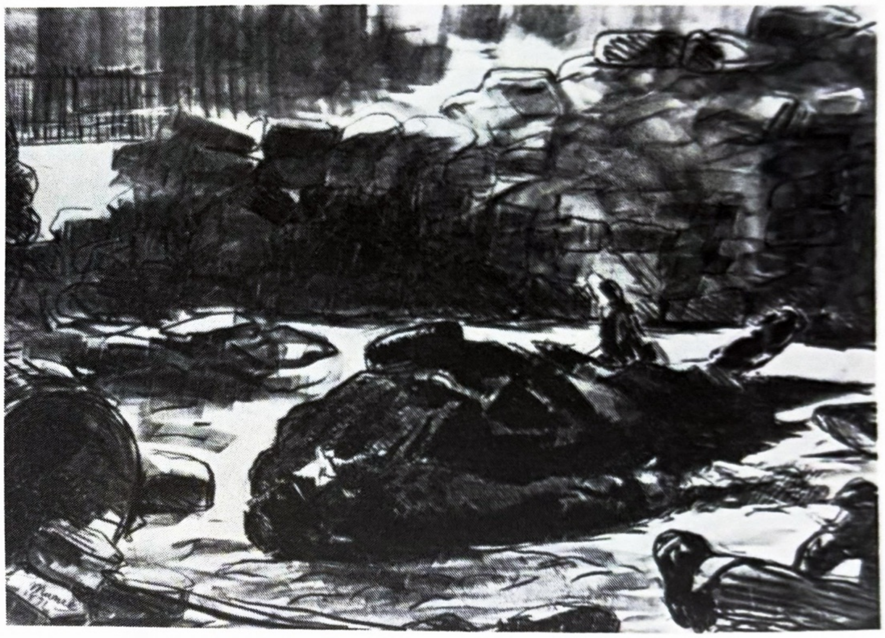
In *The Execution of Maximilian* (1868), two kinds of white clash by being juxtaposed: the untouched white of the blank spaces (the gaiters and sword belts), and the white of the scraped areas, which range from the simple scratch (necks, bottoms of jackets, ground, walls) to the confusion of the crowd (a mishmash of human figures at the top of the picture, the extension of something that looks like a European cemetery in the distance). These whites,



douard Manet. The Balloon. *1862.*



Edouard Manet. The Execution of Maximilian. *1868.*



Edouard Manet. Civil War. *1871–73.*

so close in value, so different in texture, combine: they come together in one area (body and smoke) to create an interstice, a fold, a throbbing of space, an infinitesimal density wherein the unusually spiritless death of the condemned men is glossed over.

The indifference to the execution with which one taxes the artist is perhaps especially a matter of whites. As in the painting that is its source, there is in the lithograph a disjunction between the economy of the drama and that of the light. The dispersion of light areas (as in the horizontal line of the belts) contradicts the emotional concentration (Goya encloses the victims in a dazzling triangle). In *The Barricade,* the whites, more diffuse, this time invade the whole space. In front of the same firing squad, a communard dies in a corner, pathetically brandishing his cap, his arm already corroded, buried, and pushed back into the neutrality of the sheet by the relentless scurrying of the engraving tool.

In his lithographs, Manet severs with particular boldness the contour and substance of the object. The third-floor windows in *The Barricade* are merely a flourish inscribed *alongside* the gray surface of the openings. In *Civil War,* the paving stones decompose in the same way.[30] This displaced condition, or position *alongside,* goes back to the mechanism of *willful discrepancy* that I mentioned before. If we join Alain de Leiris in examining Manet's drawings,[31] we find, amid the diversity of styles, a few works of a sovereign mastery, with an assured and continuous line, and even without second thoughts (portrait of the artist's parents, studies for *Olympia,* etc.). There are also, at the other end of the scale, some "little figures [*bonshommes*]," childish-looking scrawls, to which we will come back. Between the two: an early group of youthful drawings executed in Italy, after the masters, in the 1850s—fairly free copies of frescoes (Fra Angelico, Ghirlandajo, Andrea del Sarto) and reliefs (Luca della Robbia). Many of these drawings are characterized by a double outline (what Leiris calls "a two-step method"). A first line, light and flowing, faithfully follows the subject. The second, on the other hand, far from simply reinforcing the first, openly distinguishes itself from it. Thick, arbitrary, often reduced to a few straight segments, this second drawing crushes outlines, hardens curves, and sometimes runs across the image (incisions, streaks), contradicting its mimetic purpose.

For the most active draftsmen of the past, the Guercinos, Rembrandts, and Rosas, overflow has to do with approximation, excess presupposes the norm, and the line, even if "impulsive" and disordered, relates to the figure and the scene.[32] With Manet, we are no longer dealing with *pentimenti,* correction, and approximation. Between the first and second network of lines, the mimetic wish seems to give way, supplanted by something like a critical repetition, a *dysgraphie* (to adopt a term used by Barthes in connection with Twombly). These drawings give a taste of the *unfolding* operation that will be at the core of the artist's work. What he will later execute, under the sign of the series, through a whole apparatus of tracings, photos, engravings, and so forth, can already be found *condensed* on the same page in the "Florentine copies," but with

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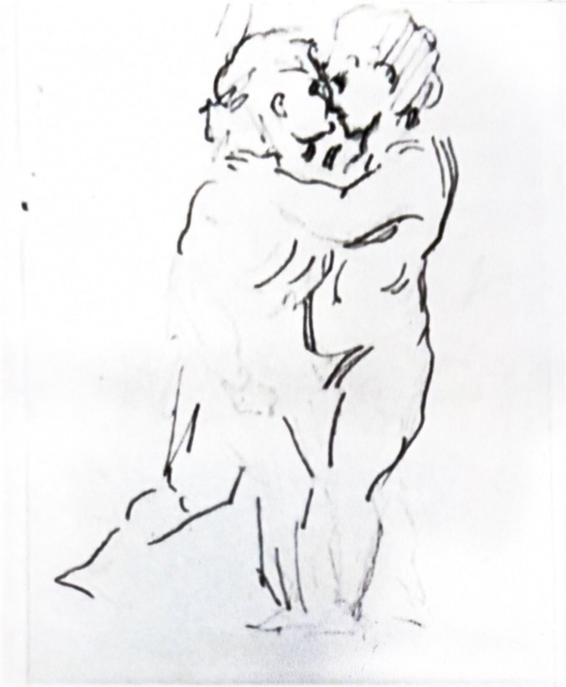
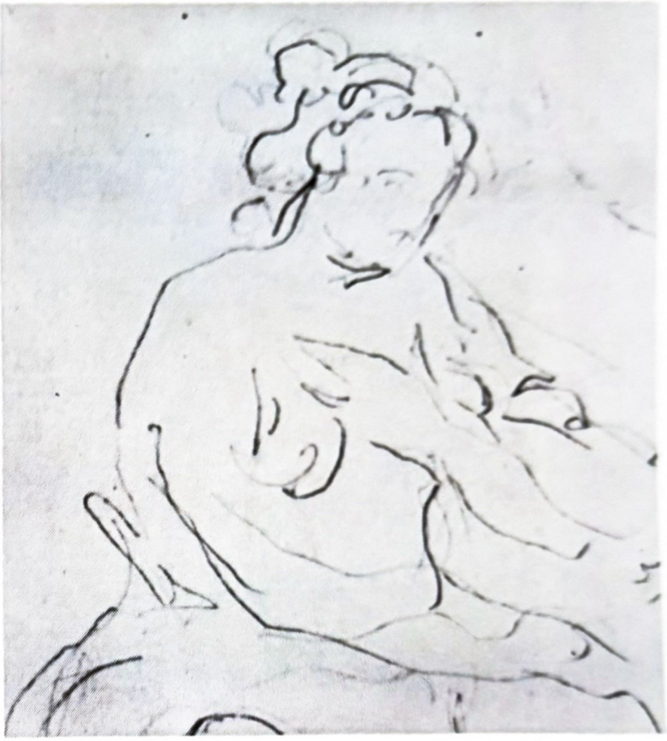
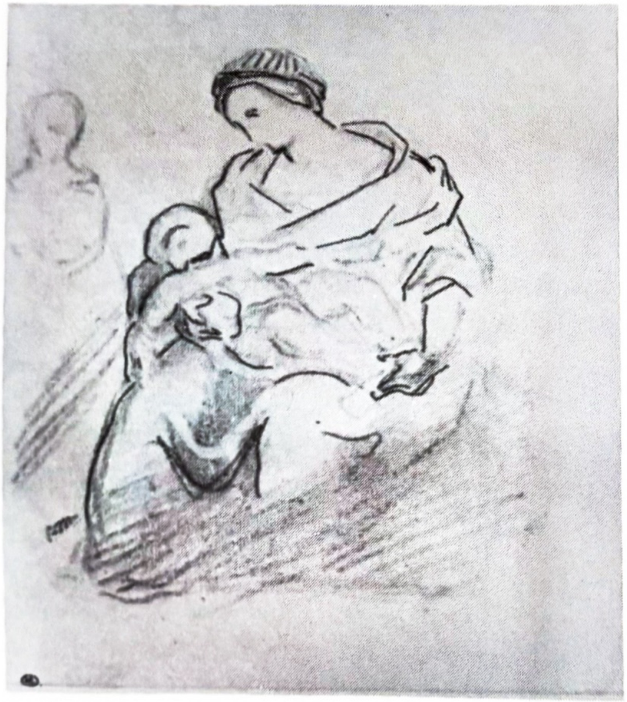
[30] The procedure anticipates one of the most notorious features of cubism.

[31] Their number has been estimated between 600 and 700. Alain de Leiris, *The Drawings of Edouard Manet,* Los Angeles, 1969.

[32] In the late eighteenth century, one finds in the paintings of Hubert Robert and in his counterproofs a deliberate use of *divergence.* The artist plays around with the regular lines of perspective that he has previously drawn on his canvas or sheet of paper. He distorts them, displaces them. But it is still only a question of insidiously introducing, for a surplus of fantasy, a governing apparatus that is the basis of his *Views* and the instrument necessary for our vertigo.





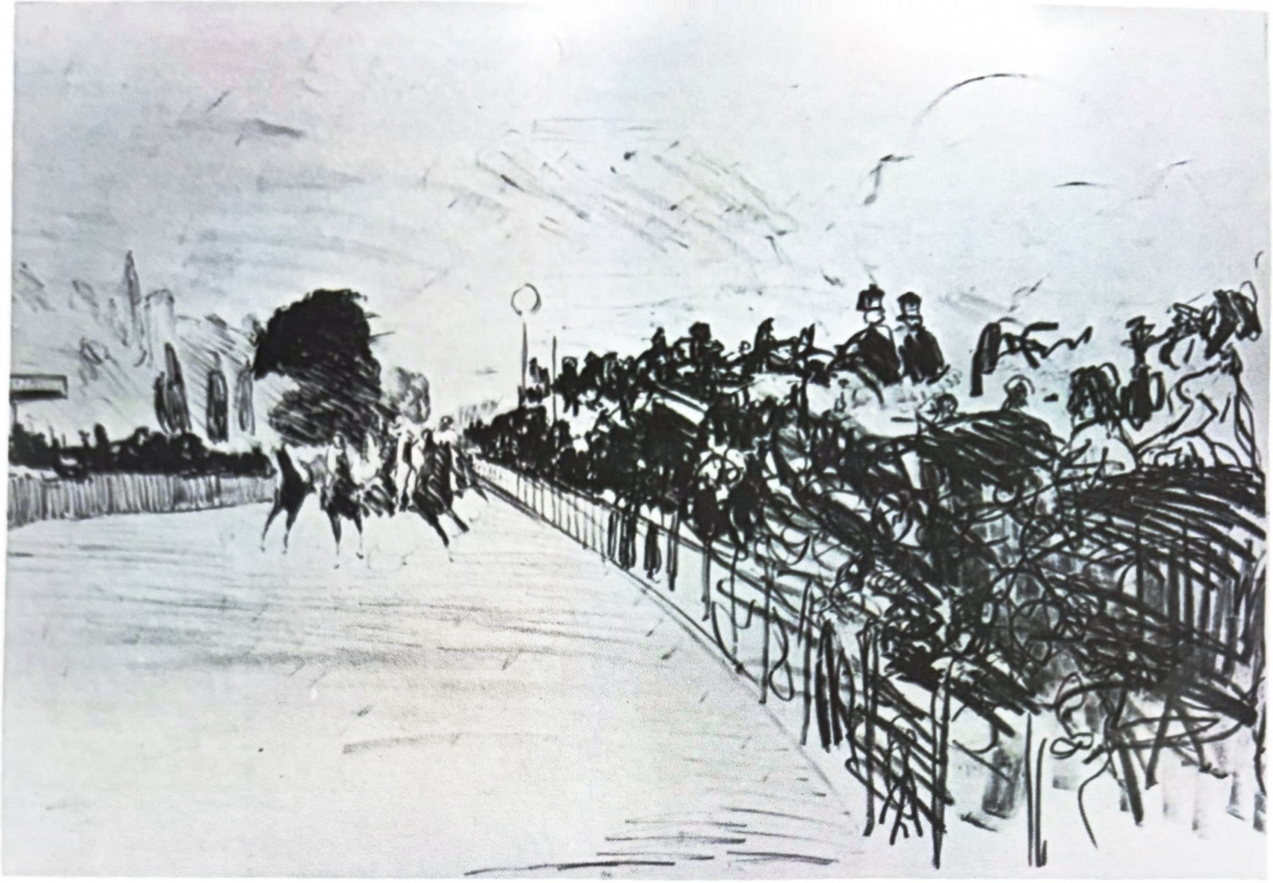


Edouard Manet. Drawings. *Louvre, Cabinet des Dessins.*

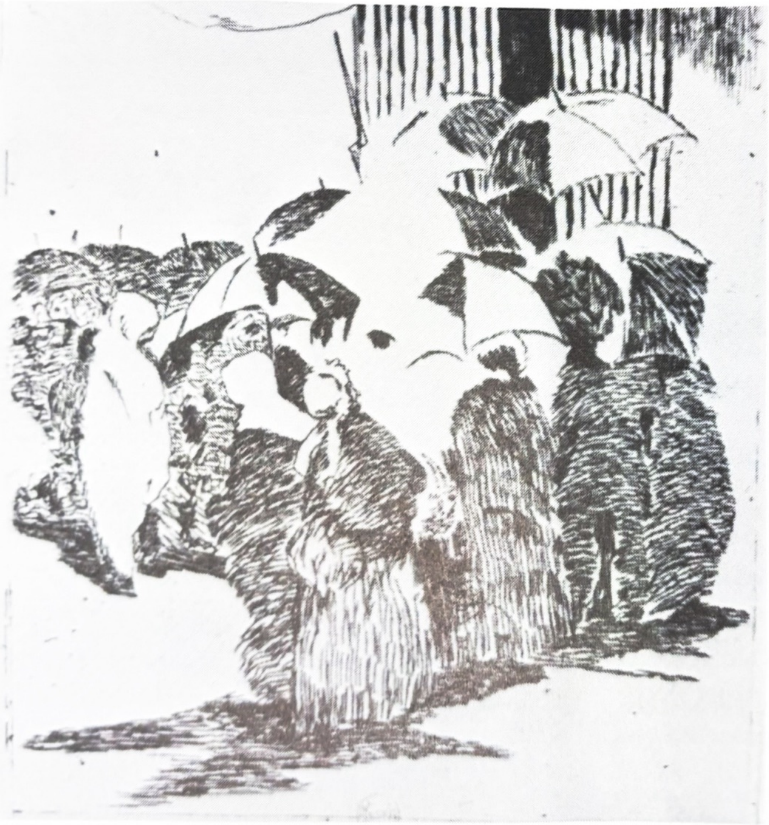
its development—from the flat sheet of the layered work (*de la feuille au feuilleté*)—foreshadowed.

These outlines represent neither the truth of the subject nor the energy of the draftsman. Poverty of execution. No manual gift. No "knack." Some heavily slanted "circumflex accents"—small gougings visible when held up to the light; sometimes an interlacing of little loops, a whole stenography: like a search for clumsiness. A hardness of the pencil that restores the feeling of the surface and moves the drawing in the direction of calligraphy.

Examining another group of youthful drawings, mainly pencil studies of drapery, Leiris notes that depth and tactile values are not rendered in them by



Edouard Manet. The Races. *1865–72.*



Edouard Manet. The Queue at the Butcher Shop.
187[illegible]

variations in density, but by a suspension: there is an absence of line whenever it is a question of indicating a change of plane.[33] This way of enlisting the blank spaces, of putting them to use in the *creation of mass,* prefigures the "geological" white spaces of Cézanne's watercolors (of which we are reminded by Manet's draperies, seen from the side, with their flat, broad, firm lines, without gradation). This same wish to create mass—but "in reverse"—can also be seen in the later drawings, devoted especially to contemporary life. Manet uses hatching extensively. This invests the whole with form: a frontal and synthetic image, often partitioned by a single black line. The artist favors compact volumes: silhouettes from behind, in great number; sailboats; a cat licking its fur, flat as a pancake. In his frontal attack, Manet operates as though he had cut through the object with a cleaver; we see its section: the distorted arms and legs take on the appearance of peninsulas.

Above all, the unity of the form no longer coincides with that of the object. Several objects show a tendency to merge in the same form, giving rise to unexpected configurations: puddles of people, couples combining to form a single spot or area. These composites, these new signifying units, are also produced by the surface: the hatchings espouse its flatness, which secretly influences the drawing. The most striking example of this tendency—but I will come back to it in examining the sequence in which this work has its place—is the lithograph *The Races.* In order to "render" the horses galloping toward the finish line (and toward the onlooker), Manet intrepidly draws his customary network of black lines. He treats speed—the essence of modernity glorified by Baudelaire—the way he treats the sagging silhouette of an absinthe drinker.

Needless to say, Manet constantly takes into consideration the empirical reality of the support—its two-dimensional nature. As all histories of art remind us, it is with him that the "definitive flattening" of painting takes place. We have seen some of his procedures: spaces left blank, equal thickness of line, hatchings, rubbing (*frottage*). His etchings offer others: the granular mat quality of the aquatint (learned from Goya); the weaving of a regular network of large stitches that blocks the opening of the gaze (*The Tragic Actor*); the identity of value and texture between objects and "background" (in *The Queue at the Butcher Shop,* the dazzling white of the umbrellas connects with the same white denoting distance).

In some of Manet's paintings, the (two-dimensional) support is replaced, represented by a screen that confines the scene to the foreground. The quite correct perspective rendering of Olympia's body ends by stumbling against the verticality of a curtain placed "too close." The wall in *Maximilian* cuts the spatial continuity like a cleaver. It closes off the scene and reduces the great event to this cramped space. I see the proof that the wall is the representation of the support in its proportions: exactly half of the total height of the painting, as though

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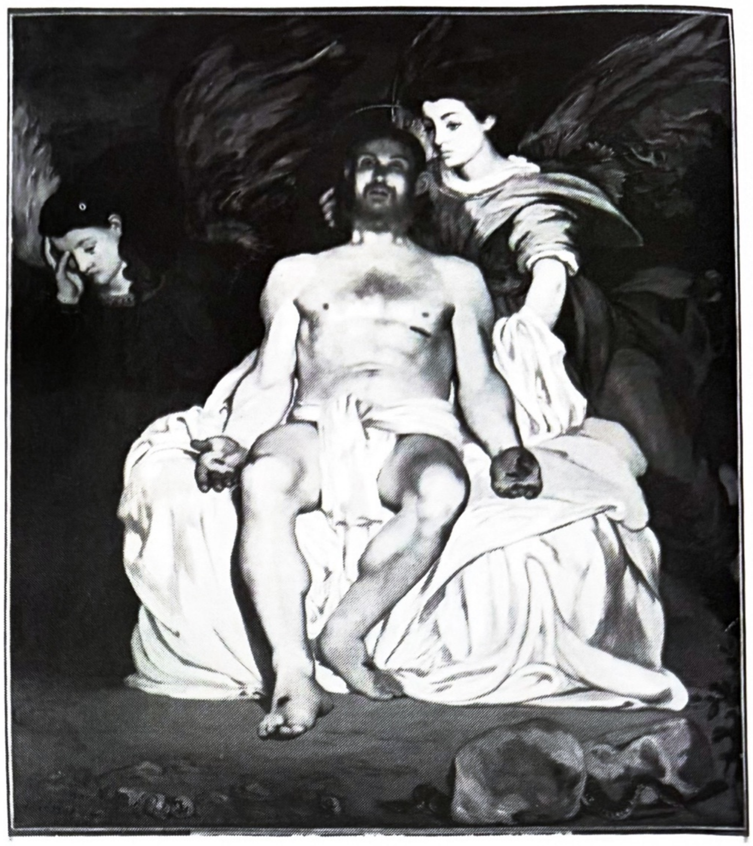
[33] Leiris, *Drawings,* p. 45.

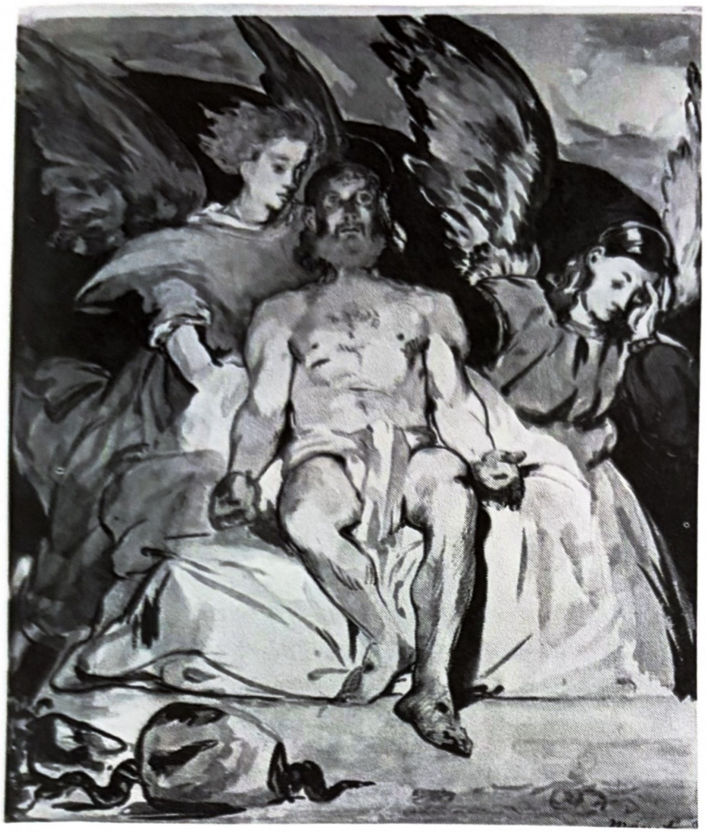
Edouard Manet. The Dead Christ with Angels.
Left: oil, 1864. Center: water color, 1865–67.
Right: etching, 1866–67.

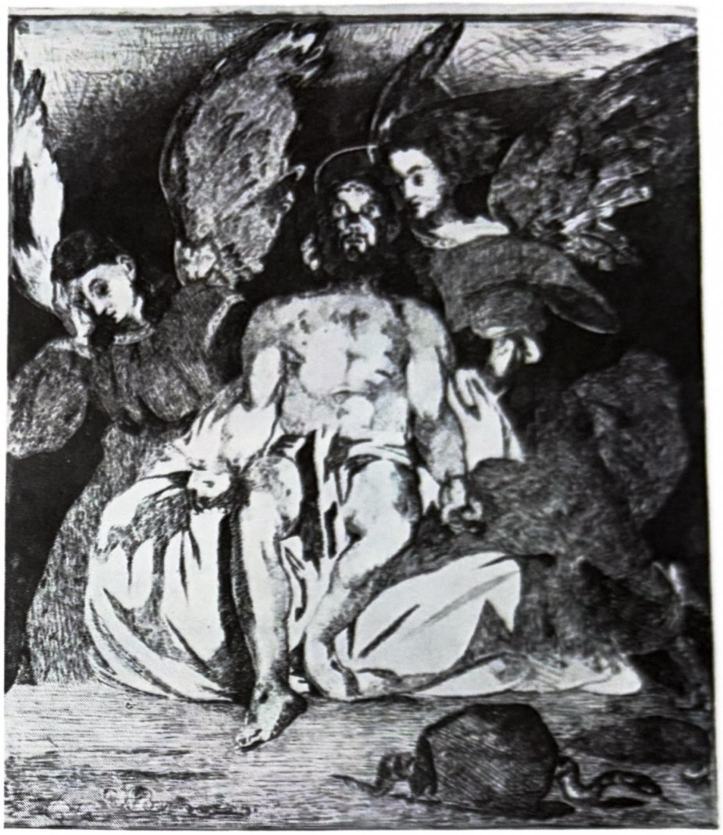


the artist, without realizing it, had felt the need to connect structurally the material *background* of the work and the *background* of the historical drama. And the *veduta* that opens in the upper part only makes this closing off more obvious. The neoclassicists of the eighteenth century were well aware of the effectiveness of the contrast between open and closed. Hence David in his *Count Potocki.*

There is flatness in Manet, but perhaps still more a *movement* toward the flat. To express this movement, let us posit for a moment, at the expense of etymology, the illusion of a double front in painting: *surface* and *superficies.* There would be (at least) two kinds of frontality: first, the one that is organized in accordance with the support, leaning on it and clinging to it—Gauguin in general, Vuillard until 1905, the Nabis, or again Juan Gris, and even analytical cubism before stenciling and pasted paper are used for the specific purpose of adding play and ambiguity, and opening up the space-plane. Matisse (prior to 1918) would belong to this category, which strives to equate the support and the painting. The omnipresence of blank space in many of his paintings constantly reminds us of the material foundation of the work. But even in his most frontal compositions, the creator of *The Red Studio* likewise allows allusion to three dimensions to remain (modeling of a body, perspective view of a bit of architecture, etc.). With him the image is never flat: it *tends toward* flatness. It is *in motion* toward the surface. The painting is the suspended expression of a process that does not come completely to a head.

It has been said that Manet suggests this tension—but in the other direc-





tion. Like an expanding mass that collides with the obstacle of a windowpane, his figures end up crushed against the *superficies* of the painting, against the film separating us from them.[34] The petals of the white peonies (Louvre) adhere to this invisible glass, just as the horses at Longchamp, interrupted in full gallop, hurl themselves at it (Washington version). Hence likewise the cuts with the cleaver, and the distortions in the outlines of bodies, of which I have already spoken. This effect of presence brought nearer quite obviously owes much to the painter's flat and heavy touch, to his rejection of halftones, as well as to his cramped settings. But there are some works in which this kind of touch is not used, and which still give us a feeling of inaccessible proximity. On comparing the versions of *The Dead Christ with Angels,* one sees how, by different procedures, Manet keeps accentuating his push toward the *superficies*. Thanks to the lighting, to the viewing angle, to the daring frontal pose, and to the closing off of the represented space, the dead Christ, in the version on canvas, seems on the point of sliding toward us. His archaicizing monumentality, however, holds him back. In any case, it is the "staging" that arouses our conflicting feelings. But in the Louvre watercolor, which repeats the same subject in reverse, the lighter parts of the body are now set off by gouache highlights, all equal in value, thus flattening the figure *on a single vertical section.* Finally, in the etchings, it is the blank spaces that replace the parts highlighted by gouache. A papercutter seems to have descended on the figure of Christ and his shroud. From the first state to the third, the artist hardens the contrast between the dark stretches and the shining whiteness of the paper. In the final version, a cluster of luminous spots occupies the whole center of the image, which here too one might think to be pressed against an invisible glass. A double game of summons and aloofness that some (Florisoone, Bataille) have called Manet's "supreme indifference."

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[34] Françoise Cachin, in the recent Metropolitan Museum catalogue, also perceives a glass pane in Manet's painting. She locates it between the foreground of *Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe* and the figures: "Only the dour gaze of Victorine seems to pass through a glass separating the foursome from us the spectators and from the still life" (*Manet,* exhibition catalogue, Paris and New York, 1983, p. 169).

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I have suggested above that Manet may have been the first artist to feel the constituent elements of the painting (of his time)—surface, border, color, texture, gesture—to be dissociable. And that where painting had hitherto tended from the outset toward unity (supported as it was as much by a strictly mimetic aim reactivated by a realism of Courbet, as by an age-old conception of harmony, of *concinnitas*),[35] Manet, for his part, made use of these constituents as in a play of variables that one might test, "try out" one by one, favoring this or that element in such a way that the work was not the governed resolution of tensions, but just the opposite: the coalescence of conflicting elements *at work.* And if the picture is indeed, in this context, a "weak unity," in which forces intersect and struggle, these forces themselves participate in *series* that go beyond the conclusion of the painting. Manet illustrates by anticipation Foucault's observation: "To the last dreamers, one should point out that a painting (and probably in every sense of the word) is formally a 'series of series.'"[36]

"Synthetic and an abridger"—such was Baudelaire's expression to characterize Guys or Corot. Applied to Manet, it is false. When Huysmans writes: "M. Manet paints by abridging nature as it is and as he sees it," he thinks he is making the artist a champion of *fa presto,* whose activity would belong exclusively to the *iconic,* and who would try to seize "from life," by way of notation, of the sketch, the essential structure of the object—just as a Carpeaux deploys all his *prestezza* to set down in a few touches thrown on the canvas the *Bal aux Tuileries* or the *Attentat de Bérézowski* (Louvre, both from 1867). This observation neglects what, in Manet, pertains not to abridgement but to

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[35] "[Alberti] introduced—or rather reintroduced—into the theory of the representational arts what was to become the central concept of Renaissance aesthetics, the hoary principle of *convenienza* or *concinnitas,* perhaps best rendered by the word 'harmony': '[The painter] must take pains, above all, that all the parts agree with each other; and they will do so if in quantity, in function, in kind, in color, and in all other respects, they harmonize (*corresponderanno*) into one beauty'" Erwin Panofsky, *Renaissance and Renascences in Western Art,* New York, 1969, p. 26.

[36] Michel Foucault, *L'Archéologie du savoir,* Paris, 1969, p. 19.

equivalence: the contraction and displacement of mimetic indications, which are arranged arbitrarily here and there without taking any further account of the structural identity of the object, in accordance with an economy that could be called *quantitative,* the artist being content to show the substance or color of the object, detached from its representational coherence. In *View of the Exposition Universelle* (1867), a string of cruciform or shapeless red spots, distributed in disorder against the green of the plants, has the function of furnishing the *equivalent* of a flowerbed without ever trying to resemble it. In the foreground of *Races at Longchamp* (Washington), an even scattering of tiny black and yellow spots enlivens the turf. In the creamy brightness of a pastel face (*Méry Laurent,* Dijon)—the paradoxical anticipation of Fautrier's *Hostages*—Manet "plants" other small bursts: red blur of the lips, starry blue translucence of the eye, mingled with fragments of bare canvas, a miraculous look of exquisite water. Certain portraits (*Cabaner, Moore*) are constituted by a scaffolding of linear or curved spots—pinks, yellows, blues—that are unrelated to any anatomical facts. Streaks whose overlapping forms an eyesocket, and their transverse latticework, a cheek. Did anyone, before Manet, push so far the separation between painting and bone structure, accentuating the gestural deconstruction of the human figure to the point of treating head, clothing, and setting in the same way?[37] The difference in treatment, if there is one, between the head and the rest is no longer a matter of touch but of layer: it resides in the sometimes increased thickness of the faces. Now the artist paints, not unknown persons or types (as Daumier did), but identifiable individuals, friends. This is the elating function of the model for Manet. Before anything else, he sees there a means of exhilaration. Cheerful consumption—and restitution *alongside.*[38] The artist looks at his "subject" the way Laforgue, almost in the same period, looks at a painting: he needs a "spasm of the eye,"[39] and the clothing in the studio is switched around and divided up until the brush begins to flow. There is his fascination with veils, hats, ostrich feathers, boas, fox stoles—Méry's fur coat, Nina's bolero with yellow embroidery—themes more adjectival than substantive.

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[37] Perhaps one should mention Frans Hals, for a few extreme paintings (the middle ground of *The Regents*). But Péladan observes: "When one paints in grainy *pastosità* and without glaze, there is a logical behavior of the brush, one that must espouse not only the modeling but the very line of the forms. One can study this question of the sense of touch in Frans Hals and Rembrandt. Let us take, for example, *The Man in the Fur Cap*: there we see the impasto conducted according to the drawing with an infallibility and rectitude that take nothing away from the contingency of value; in the paintings of Hals, one can inspect even the traces of the hairs of the brush, and one does not perceive that perpetual randomness of the brush that, in Manet, causes the color to overflow beyond the line, as in those vulgar, hastily printed chromolithographs" (Péladan, p. 172).

For his part, Thoré-Burger, as early as 1863, regretted that "under these brilliant costumes, the person himself is somewhat lacking. The heads ought to have been painted differently from the draperies, with more accents and depth" (Théophile Thoré-Burger, *Salon de 1863,* quoted in Michel Florisoone, ed., *Manet,* Monaco, 1947, p. 117).

[38] "I took a chair behind him and watched him work. Manet, although painting pictures from the model, was not copying nature at all; I took note of his masterful simplifications. The head of his wife was being modeled; but his modeling was not obtained with the means that nature indicated. Everything was curtailed: the tones were clearer, the colors brighter, the values closer . . ." (Georges Bonniot, *La Grande revue,* 10 August 1907).

And then, as though inadvertently, along comes an incongruous, violent, fierce image (awakened perhaps by the obscuring irruption of black veils)—almost a blunder: Morisot as gorgon, chthonian specter,[40] a painting that falls apart in an agglomeration of thick impasto like pellets of clay, forcing us to accept not only the rigidity of the *pose,*[41] but something like a portrait *from* death—already substituted for the death it foreshadows. An image in the future

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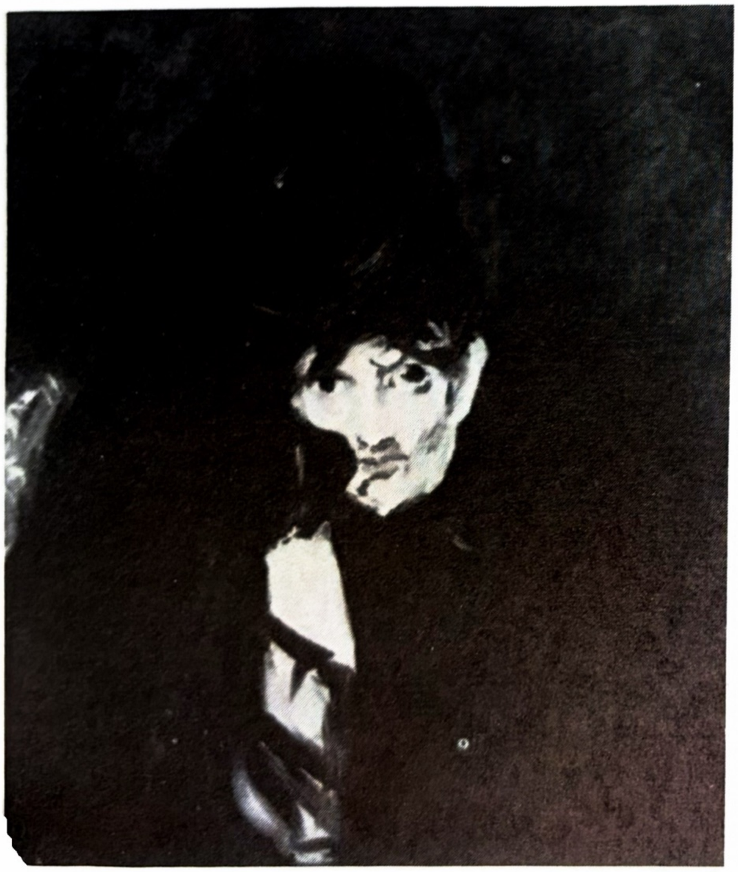
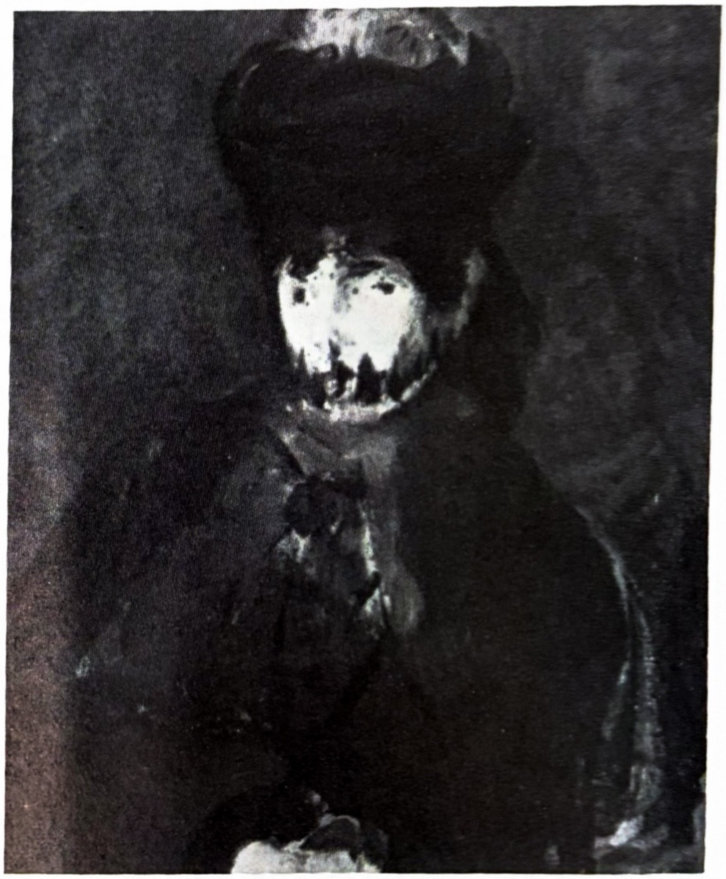
[39] "For me, painting without the spasm of the eye is platonic, courtly, castrated love—an unlocalized love" (Jules Laforgue, *Mélanges posthumes,* 1903 [reprinted Geneva, 1979]).

[40] "Friendly Medusa," Mallarmé called her; "easily, dangerously silent," Valéry; "Goyaesque character," Jacques-Émile Blanche.

[41] *Poser* (to pose). Popular Latin *pausare,* "to cease, to stop" (in this sense already in Plautus), hence, in the Latin of Christian inscriptions, "to repose (in speaking of a dead person)." Bloch and Wartburg, *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue française.*



Edouard Manet. Portrait of Berthe Morisot with Hat, in Mourning. *1874.*



Edouard Manet. Young Girl with a Veil. *1873.*

perfect tense, where mourning begins: I paint while knowing that this portrait will survive you; I paint what you will have been. I cannot paint you otherwise than in this cruel way, for this idea is already gnawing at my canvas.

To what extent is Manet able to increase the separation between the figural facts and the autonomy of the pictorial substance? His strategy is often to choose "subjects" where the separation is in some way presupposed by the nature of the referent. A shimmer of fabrics, satin, taffeta, crêpe, which the artist, taking his cue from Velázquez, depicts by dissociating the "shine" (*"les luisants"*—a term liked by Delacroix) and the folds of the garment.[42] Manet plays like a virtuoso on all the indications of light—from the meticulous touch (the oranges in the *Folies-Bergère*) to the broad and extended frontal touch the size of a hand (*Mallarmé*) or of a back (*The Pavers*). Other expedients: objects distorted, veiled, or filtered through a screen: the magnifying effect produced by a vase filled with water, mottled mirrors, the billowing sea. Or again: screens and tapestries offering only an erratic distribution of colors. And even portraits of dogs, shaggy balls of fur. Not that the "subject" here dictates the style: in the Renaissance (and even as late as Ingres) these themes were painted with the extreme care of the miniaturist. It is the style that dictates the "subject," allowing the painter to feign, with impunity, separation within separation.

But to what extent? Every touch in Manet's more advanced canvases raises the same question. How far can the procedure of equivalence, of the quantitative, be pushed? Everything happens, as I said at the beginning, as though the painter were constantly belaboring the breaking point, and at each application taking the risk of formlessness. A "perverse mirror" (Mallarmé), the painting is henceforth the place where the old solidarity of sign and gesture, figure and substance, the readable and the visible, threatens to come undone. Is the muddle of speckles denoting the crowd in the background of the *Bullfight* (1866), or behind the barriers of *Races at Longchamp,* acceptable (readable)—even though Goya has prepared us for such excesses in his treatment of *masses*? Are those "displaced" hands acceptable, those stumps of yellow matter (or colored peonies)—and of which the artist sometimes gives us an old-fashioned modeled version as a counterpart in the same painting? Is the gross rhomboidal touch under the eye of the drinker in *Café-Concert* acceptable? And Nina's right sleeve, a telluric chaos? And the white commas with which *The Pavers* are striped? And the pigment spread like butter on Monet's face?

Note also, in several works, the doubling of the contour, which has been attributed to their unfinished state (*Clemenceau,* etc.). But the *Nu de dos* (Zurich,

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[42] By his random distribution of highlights all over the fabric he paints, Velázquez deconstructs the expressive and structuring effect of folds in Veronese or Tintoretto (and especially in El Greco). We already find occasionally this chance application of light spots in a few of Titian's paintings (*Portrait of Aretino,* Florence).

Manet also turns to advantage the display of light as surface and the lessening of contrasts in Chardin, whose works he studied closely.

1878), which is signed and shows continuous and displaced lines around the silhouette of a woman (as though preparing a cutout), is sufficient proof that for Manet (as soon for Cézanne) the completion of the form should not be taken for granted—and that the line can also be interpreted, beyond illusionism, as variation, counterpoint, exposure (and therefore aesthetic appropriation) of an incertitude.

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Color is, par excellence, the instance in which the process of contraction and isolation that characterizes the work of the artist operates. It has often been pointed out that while impressionism organizes the interaction of colors, all of them solid, Manet abruptly juxtaposes them, and when necessary encloses them by a net. Sometimes it is to the wallpaper or tapestry that he delegates the function of chromatic stimulation (*Nana, Autumn*). Or again: just as we have seen color dispersed in small bursts within a face, so it is distributed in independent spots over the whole painting. The energy of the light tones, concentrated in a few strong points, suffices—in accordance with a procedure that will recur in modern cinema with Godard—to enliven the whole (*Zola, Duret, In the Conservatory, The Bar at the Folies-Bergère*). Mallarmé discovers this periodic nature of the color in *Masked Ball at the Opera*: "The maskers thus do nothing in the painting but break, by the tones of a few fresh bouquets, the potential monotony of the background of black suits . . . a modern crowd . . . could not have been painted without a few bright notes to assist in enlivening it."[43] The procedure applies, moreover, to the blacks: many of Manet's paintings are strewn with broad dark gashes—veins in the folds of fabrics, shreds of dangling contours, a hodgepodge of disordered black touches on a light background (*Berthe Morisot with Muff,* 1869).

Conversely, the artist sometimes tends, not to scatter a few lively tones, but to subject a single tone to gradations in value. In *The Escape of Rochefort,* the same blue-green, highlighted by black or white accents and with the gray undercoat occasionally showing through, governs the surface, to the virtual exclusion of any warm color. In the small landscapes at the end of the artist's life, the separate touches, from black to green and from green to yellow, are juxtaposed in accordance with a declination that suggests the modulations of Cézanne.

Recent studies have sought to attribute some of Manet's innovations to

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[43] Stéphane Mallarmé, "Le jury de peinture pour 1874 et M. Manet," *Oeuvres complètes,* Paris, 1945, p. 697. See also Duret: "Others attenuated the brightness of the colors, merged the tones, enveloped the contours in shadow. He suppressed the shadows, brought everything into the light, juxtaposed distinct tones, and placed a few accentuated notes of color throughout" (Duret, p. 118).

Couture, his teacher in the 1850s. His sketches, with their broad chalky flat areas, would account for the flat touch of the younger artist. But the lights in Couture, those formidable frontal constructions so striking in their materiality, which dramatize the chiaroscuro, are reabsorbed each time into the logic of illusionism: they are consistent with the areas of shadow, which are subject to gradation.[44] We are in the presence of a neo-Caravaggism that, even when it pushes the contrast of light and dark to the extreme, has no other purpose than to produce coherent and compact representation of the subject. The plastic constituents coalesce for a single end—which absorbs them. Manet's flat touch, the frequent elimination of shadows or their frontalization as a surface effect—these are so many procedures obeying another logic. And still more his general conception, which belongs, as we have seen, less to conciseness and the sketch than to quantitative equivalence. It is a question of bringing the mechanisms of representation to light, and showing representation itself as a process.

Beyond the imitation of his teacher (Diderot spoke of "a little easy and limited technique, what we call among ourselves a protocol"), the affinities are rather to be sought in Guys (of whom Manet owned sixty works and whose portrait he painted). His transparent pools of watercolor overlap as if by chance, and the kind of independence that presides over the relation between line and color spot (a relation in which they do not converge but try to outdo each other) finds its response in the studies for *Jeanne Duval* and for *Music in the Tuileries* (1862), in *Odalisque* (1862–68?), and *Study of Legs* (1876–78). The "painter of modern life" probably helped to release early in Manet this freedom that led him to allow formless areas and nuclei of confusion to proliferate by metastasis. Their initial effect—as in *Tuileries* and *Exposition Universelle*—is to make the spectator lose his bearings, causing a crisis that we will have to scrutinize.

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At this point in our inquiry, it is the word *procedure* that will give us a better grasp of Manet's contribution (in the categories of representation and the series). Procedure does not mean *technique.* It is, from our point of view, its opposite. The word *technique,* as used, for example, by Zola, relates to the idea of control, of mastery. In 1879, he points out "the difficulty that [Manet] encounters in execution. . . . I mean that his hand is not equal to his eye. He has not been able to establish a technique for himself . . . when he starts out, one never knows how he will reach the end, or even if he will reach it at all. He acts by guesswork."[45] For Zola, writes Gaëton Picon, "between the conception and the work, there is and can only be the mediation of technical execution; the positive aspect of this void, this initial incertitude, does not cross his mind."[46] For the artist to expose himself to the void of which Picon speaks means to put himself in a position of instability, of *proclivity*: not a fall into the ungovernable (which would amount to *astasia*) but a negotiation by the artist coming to grips with the material he has chosen to invest, in a ceaseless oscillation between the plan and the process of carrying it out. The work is not thought out in advance and then *executed*: it formulates *itself,* it conducts *itself,* it verifies *itself* through the successive clarifications by which it is established. It emerges, beyond the shock that launches it, from the painter's acceptance of the coincidences and discrepancies contained in his material. An unprogrammed succession of pictorial effects that suggest to him, by their effect on each other, the invention of his own gestures. Just as the poet "yields the initiative to words" (Mallarmé), assured that they will organize themselves according to the unconscious of language, so the painter means to open and offer himself to the simultaneously logical and unforeseeable arrangements of formative pictorial elements.[47]

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[44] The distinctive look of the sketches is moreover very attenuated in the finished painting, which remains the goal: "A fine sketch can attract people around you, friends and colleagues may sincerely admire what you have begun, but you must finish, you must express more" (Thomas Couture, *Méthodes et entretiens d'atelier,* Paris, 1867, p. 235).

The procedure merges with the work: it must be foreseen—as the way of beginning—for the work to be unforeseeable. This modern certitude is already expressed in Manet. In order to *bring forth* the painting, we see him accepting—better still, arousing—the risks of the pictorial process. The procedures he sets in position give him the means to ensure the production of images while avoiding any stylistic prescription. These procedures are: *the series* and *speed.* They are defective, flawed: they incorporate loss as a condition and means of production. Thus, as we will see, the tracing does not have for Manet the mission of reproducing, but of filtering and interpreting. It is an aesthetic operator. It safeguards the general design, the structure of the whole—but it selects: through the translucent veil of the paper, the artist sees certain parts stand out which he isolates and transfers to the new work. It all takes place as though Manet were multiplying the repetitions and filterings in order to increase the possibilities for beginning and displacing the autonomous chain of the pictorial signifier. The work is spread out in time, *deferred,* as though to encourage productive discrepancies. It relates to the sequence and the layered (anticipated, as we have seen, in the superimposed drawings of the Florentine period). Each stage—painting, drawing, engraving—is a pause, a *station* in a general process. The *Races at Longchamp* series includes, in addition to various

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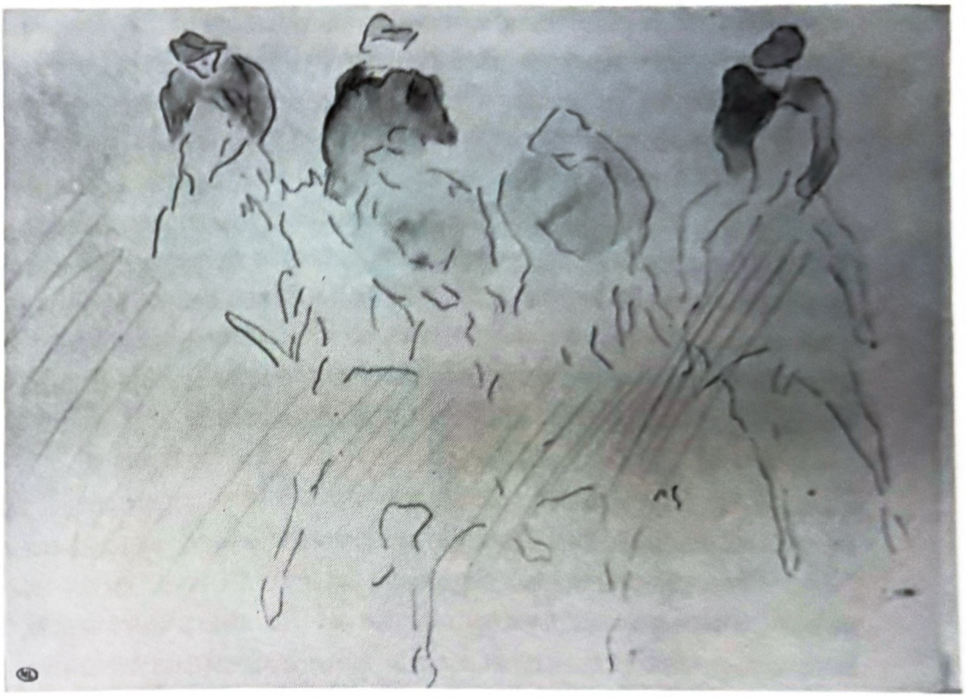
[45] I refer to Jean-Paul Bouillon's critical edition, published under the title: Émile Zola, *Le Bon combat,* Paris, 1974, p. 205.

[46] Gaëton Picon, preface to Zola, *Le Bon combat,* pp. 19–20.

[47] Which anyway belong not to some "essence" of painting, but at best to long historical duration. The "essence" of painting shifts with the vicissitudes of the latter.



Edouard Manet. Races at Longchamp. *1867–71.*

sketches done on the spot, at least nine states:[48] (1) *a horizontal watercolor* (1864; Fogg Art Museum), consisting of two joined sheets. It shows a group scene: the arrival of the horses on the right, and a fashionable public, carriages, and so on; (2) *a very large canvas* (approx. 80 x 200 cm) that repeats the same arrangement. Exhibited in 1865, it was later destroyed by the artist (two fragments survive); (3) *an oil sketch* (Chicago, c. 1867), which shows only the right-hand portion of the first composition (as though Manet had separated the two sheets he had joined in 1864); (4) *a canvas,* exhibited in 1867, an enlarged repetition of the sketch (disappeared); (5) *a lithograph* (1865–69?); (6) *an oil sketch* in which the horses appear at the center (c. 1867); (7) *an oil on wood* (1872–75; Washington), where they occupy the foreground; (8) *an oil study* in which the horses go beyond the edge; (9) *a drawing,* pencil and watercolor (Cabinet des Dessins, Louvre).

If one rapidly examines this downward progress through the most diverse surface supports, one notes that the artist in the beginning adopts a broad vision, with panoramic and picturesque ambitions. But he soon realizes that he is in the process of diluting the strong point of his undertaking: the powerful and paradoxical invention that as yet appears only as detail, namely, to treat the galloping of the horses by freezing them, not in profile, in accordance with the tradition of Stubbs, Ward, or Géricault, but from the front, at the price of a rotation of forty-five degrees. He decides therefore to sacrifice the panoramic point of view and to extract the portion in which his painting operates at the maximum of tension. From work to work, we see the horses take on importance, coming to occupy at the end the whole field of the image. The graphic paradox (speed seen from the front) will find its resolution in the morphological mutation of the object represented. The enlargement of the horses is the price paid for expressing what the profile would have indicated directly by the representation of the gallop: the horses, dark, swerving, and twisted blots, express speed by the anatomical discrepancies they manifest. Paradox within paradox: Manet is careful to treat the race with the airy, fluid means suggested by its fugacity. He copiously accentuates the rough mat quality, the static opacity of the oil; in the lithograph, he restores the irruption of the horses by frontal hatchings. He seems to bear down on one of the terms—weight—only so as better to convey the radical nature of his solution: expressive distortion.

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[48] Theodore Reff has counted them in *Manet and Modern Paris,* pp. 132 ff.

The result is the drawing in the Louvre. It was obtained by tracing another, unknown drawing of one of the sketches (no. 6). The intervention of the tracing produces not only an image, but an unusual aesthetic object, inconceivable in its time however much one practiced current methods of drawing. By refinement and selection, Manet's outline, uniform in thickness, makes a new, composite, incomplete, open form emerge, a single spot (*tache*), a single organism in which several objects are condensed—and which still manages to cover, as though to ensure the windowpane effect of which I spoke, a broad series of hatchings that crosses the field.

There are other series that would repay an analysis. In reading Sandblad, one understands how the different versions of *Maximilian* are "superimposed": the work is the film of their transformations.[49] I have also mentioned the circulation, by tracing and photograph, of an iconographic pattern: the firing squad. There exist five versions of *Jeanne or Spring* (1881–82): painting, reversed photograph, drawing (on the back of the photo), three-color linecut reproduction (executed with the artist's endorsement by Charles Cros's process). In general, Manet uses the photograph as a means of transfer. It allows for a twofold reduction: the composition is produced in the desired size (that of the engraving being planned), and the colors are mechanically redistributed in black and white, transposed in terms of value. But, as Carl Chiarenza points out, in the case of *Jeanne,* the photograph has other effects: in the drawing that appears *directly on the back of the proof,* certain blurred or obscure parts are reinterpreted by transparence—calligraphic accents with the brush, blank space, scrawls, scribbles, and so on.[50] And the engraving, whether it borrows from the photograph (recto) or the drawing (verso), also undergoes transformations. Manet, as a pragmatist, quickly understood the advantages to be derived from photography—not only for its fidelity, but for its betrayals.

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[49] Sandblad, 3rd part.

[50] Carl Chiarenza, "Manet's Use of Photography in the Creation of a Drawing," *Master Drawings,* vol. VII (Spring 1969), pp. 38–45.

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With the unfolding of the series, speed is one of the agents that allows Manet to wrench the painting from the conditionings of a *form* already there, and from the prescriptions of a style. It is not simply a question of going fast (like Horace Vernet), but of *breathing speed into the painting* in order to change the nature of the figurative inscription from top to bottom. This involves the establishment of a new unit of time: the sitting. Manet subordinates his work to this requirement; the picture must be painted in a day. This is a rule he sets for himself, an aesthetic modality imposed on the work in advance, and which determines its outcome. Of course, all of Manet's pictures—if only the large-sized ones—were not painted in this way (and X-rays reveal some occasional *pentimenti*). But the important thing is that he tends to it, that he sees it as a preliminary to the action, and says so: in 1879, writes Antonin Proust, one of his "idées fixes" was to "paint my portrait on an unprepared white canvas in a single sitting. . . . After having used seven or eight canvases, the portrait came all at once. Only the hands and some portions of the background were left."[51] And Manet himself explained to Proust: "I accomplish nothing all alone [without the model], all the more since I finish on the same day I begin, but I often have to start all over again and then it takes several days." For Manet did not stop working fast, and his contemporaries complain of the endless number of sittings that he imposes on them: "All the artist's intimates noted with astonishment, a respectful astonishment, the trials of endurance that his models had to undergo and on whom an unusual number of sittings were imposed."[52] He paints fast, but he rubs out. Rubbing out, repeating, rubbing out—it is this sequence that counts. One can, says Jamot, "correct by adding or correct by effacing": Manet prefers the second path.[53] It is a question of staking out the act of painting, shrinking it, thickening it, keeping it at the level of crisis, and avoiding as much as possible the softening practice of retouching. Mallarmé witnesses "the fury that hurled him on the empty canvas, confusedly, as though he had never painted before." From Manet, he understands that "you throw yourself into it completely, all over again each time."[54]

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[51] Antonin Proust, *Edouard Manet, Souvenirs,* quoted in Courthion, I, p. 192.

[52] Courthion, I, p. 34.

[53] Paul Jamot, *L'Amour de l'art,* May 1932, p. 149. Berthe Morisot wrote to her sister in 1870: "Meanwhile he is starting his portrait [of Eva Gonzalès] over again for the twenty-fifth time. She poses every day, and in the evening her head is washed out with black soap. You see how encouraging it is to ask people to pose! . . . For the moment, all his enthusiasms are concentrated on Mlle Gonzalès, but her portrait is still making no progress. He tells me that he is at the fortieth sitting and the head has been wiped out once again. He is the first to laugh about it" (quoted in Étienne Moreau-Nélaton, *Manet raconté par lui-même,* Paris, 1926, vol. I, p. 113).

[54] Stéphane Mallarmé, "Quelques Médaillons et portraits en pied," *Oeuvres complètes,* p. 532.

The artist prefers those techniques that allow for speed: etching or lithography. He becomes interested in a process of Bracquemond's that makes it possible to draw directly on the copper plate.[55] He invents a different way of using pastel: "In a sense, however, they are paintings, since the color has been applied with a brush, the lively strokes of which are clearly visible and like those of his oils."[56] And as for the canvas, it ought to glide: "A white canvas, very fine, with no grain. Manet seems to have coated it with a thin layer of oil, which he wipes before attacking that part; oil spread in such a way that each application of the sable brush glides like a watercolor brush."[57]

Why this rapidity? And what is the meaning of the spots it produces? We know Zola's physiological explanation: the artist "sees in color spots"; his "personality . . . consists in the manner in which his eye is organized."[58] A variation on the theme "only an eye, but what an eye," applied in turn to Courbet, Monet, and so on, along with its negative version: "the artist with sick retinas" (Huysmans on Cézanne). But if the cause is not in the subject, it may be in the object. Manet is often said to have set down the hurly-burly of the modern city, the restlessness of the boulevards, the technical and industrial acceleration of the Second Empire. But Balzac in 1830 had also described urban life, in many passages, as a seething mass of fleeting spots. Furthermore, Manet, unlike Daumier or Degas, is interested almost exclusively in a motionless world: still lifes, people posing, seated or standing—no less static than the figures of Corot. And when he paints the *Dead Christ,* the hand is "displaced." One would probably have to go back to the creation of the painting, and seek the raison d'être for his touch in the conflict between the gesture and the sign.

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[55] Jean-Paul Bouillon, "Bracquemond, Rops, Manet et le procédé à la plume," *Nouvelles de l'estampe,* March–April 1974, pp. 3–11.

[56] Charles Sterling and Margaretta Salinger, p. 51 (about the portrait of Louise de la Vigne). The authors add: "This unusual technique accounts for the great freshness of effect and also for the surface, which is richer and smoother than that of the conventional pastels. The use of primed canvases instead of paper also contributes to the difference in appearance. Some of the color is applied in the conventional manner with chalk sticks, but for the more important and expressive passages Manet used a technique that consisted of dipping his brush in a mixture of color, possibly ground pastel chalks, and water."

[57] Jacques-Émile Blanche, *Les Arts plastiques,* Paris, 1931, pp. 53–54. We point out that Blanche, a little earlier in the same text, speaks not of *effacing* but of *covering* the work already done: "There is a second, a third . . . a twentieth state to which no one since Manet has carried his work, and in which Manet keeps the same freshness, the same fluidity above multiple layers of semi-blots in which he has preserved the pleasurable texture of flesh." One may observe that such a number of layers is hardly compatible with the physical look of the paintings. In an earlier work, the same author, who in his youth had watched Manet paint, writes about *Jeanne or Spring*: "The rhododendrons, the cobalt blue sky, against which the silhouette stands out, 'come' always 'in front of' the figure. He scratched out and began all over again ceaselessly." Likewise for *The Equestrienne*: "I have seen Manet efface it, scratch out the top hat, and redraw it in line to make it 'hold' over the chignon" (Jacques-Émile Blanche, *Manet,* Paris, 1924, pp. 51–52).

Partial or total scratching out and covering over? Rather it would be a question of a *new start* that Manet wished to make coincide, as much as possible, with each sitting.

[58] Zola, p. 81.

Impressionism, to be sure, tends during the artist's lifetime to a uniform reduction of the various time intervals of painting. It is a matter of seeing more quickly, of painting with the most expeditious means, of paintings that ascribe less to meditation than to *effect* (in Monet's sense). Moment, spot, and spasm all go together. And this development is obviously nourished by the changes of tempo characteristic of life in a modern capital. Manet is part of this trend. In one of his letters, he mentions the "rapid and summary manner" in which he has treated a detail. He boasts of having executed the head of the *Spanish Singer* in two hours. And Matisse was to write: "He was the first to act by reflexes and thus to simplify the craft of painting. . . . Manet was as direct as it was possible to be."[59] But at the same time it would seem that we cannot, in the particular case of our painter, consider the question of speed without combining it with the notion of quantitative equivalence mentioned above. For him, speed is the means of scrambling the figures (their iconic structure), of seizing the before and after of the world in a precipitate of pigment (*Portrait of George Moore,* Mellon Collection)—and, as a corollary, of permitting a polysemy of the color spot. Double stasis: *speed* as an instrument of representational condensation—like a fan whose movement would blend the motifs; and the *spot* as the producer of things *outside the text*: unforeseen images, slips, "paragrams," whose presence in Manet's paintings makes the practice of examining details photographically so delightful and justifiable (the "pincers" in *Père Lathuille*); to which are added, more fluid still and beyond the uninvited images, the effects of meaning engendered by any material since the yoke of designation is loosened (Barthes on Réquichot: "The material is unfailingly symbolic: in perpetual displacement . . . the material is never in its place").[60]

Walter Benjamin, in connection with writing and against the thesis of the arbitrariness of signs, develops a theory, a theoretical fiction that may help us to understand what belongs, in Manet, to the proliferation of secondary effects. Reading (any deciphering of a text) might be said to have absorbed and still contain traces of the ancient divinatory practices (reading entrails, reading the stars) on which the cosmic mimesis of archaic periods was based (the identity of stellar configurations and the destiny of men). There would thus be, *stored* on the page we are reading and woven in with the instrumentality of signs, a second meaning, subliminal and mimetic in origin. And "the rapidity of writing and reading" would be, says Benjamin, the condition that permits the fleeting release of the buried elements.[61]

[59] Henri Matisse, *L'Intransigeant,* 25 January 1932, quoted in Florisoone, p. 122.

[60] Roland Barthes, "Réquichot et son corps," *L'Obvie et l'obtus,* Paris, 1982 (1973), p. 203. Example of metaphoric "flash": Bataille on the close-up portrait of George Moore: "Never perhaps has the human figure been closer to the innocence and elusive truth of the oyster" (Georges Bataille, *Manet,* Geneva, 1955, p. 120).

[61] Walter Benjamin, "On the Mimetic Faculty," in *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings,* ed. Peter Demetz, New York, 1978, p. 335.

By painting the things/spots of the world quickly, Manet in his turn produces traces on the canvas, double meanings, condensations of meanings and effects, echoes—whose archaic connotations one would do well not to overlook. This is not to question the current conception of a modern and urban Manet. Rather, it means merging two complementary images, as indeed Benjamin does when he describes the Berlin of his childhood, the Berlin of the beginning of the century where he was preparing himself to understand the Paris of the Second Empire.[62] Through the darkness of a sewer opening or in the glitter of one of his mother's jewels, what crops forth, sustained by a flood of metaphors most of which borrow from the preindustrial world, is also, in the very heart of the booming city, something like a twofold prehistory: that of a place and that of a body.

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The establishment, prior to the work, of procedures (methods of production) that guarantee a formal development independent of any stylistic presuppositions is echoed and amplified in Baudelaire's conception of *modernity.* What Manet arranges on the scale of his painting, the poet means to apply to the whole culture of his period. We know that the friendship of the two men was close, that it very likely began during the winter of 1858–59, and that two future canonical works—*Music in the Tuileries* and *The Painter of Modern Life*—were created at the height of their relationship.[63] Baudelaire loathed "progress," industry, "Americanism"—and, in general, a society determined to confine the artist and the poet to the status of parasite or entertainer. "The world is going to end" (*Fusées*), and classical culture—with which the writer himself had been imbued since childhood—is manifestly unsuitable to fill the spiritual void that is being foretold. Baudelaire's plan aims at nothing less than the formation of a modern aesthetic: an art without recollections, nourished by the side issues, pulsations, and tensions of contemporary life. He wanted to reascend the stream of the classical heritage, on this side of ideal Beauty ("here we are not concerned with Winckelmann and Raphael"), very far from the "tall lanky freaks" of the school of David, who "conceal their modesty under antique

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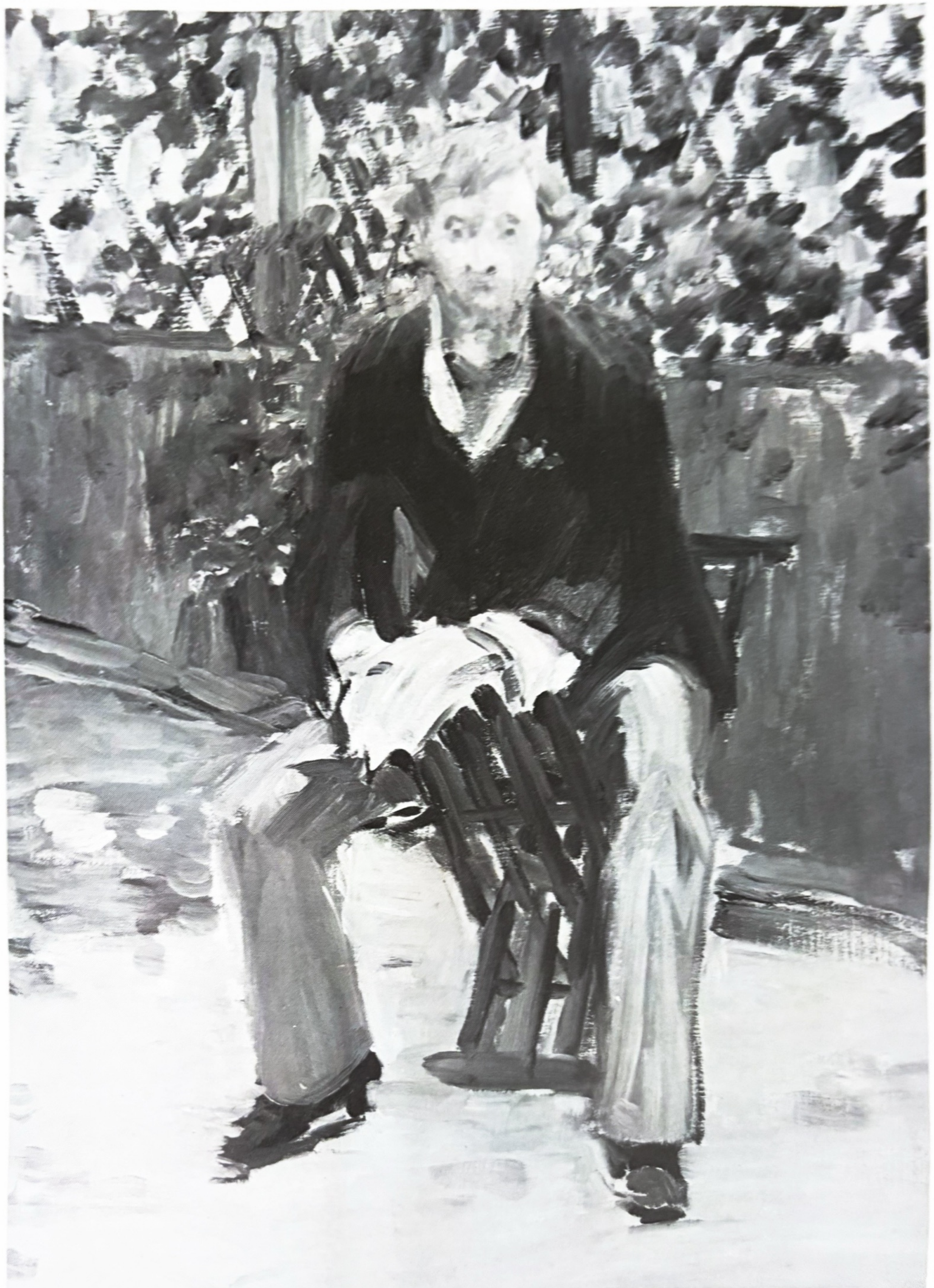
[62] W. Benjamin, "Enfance berlinoise," in *Sens unique,* Paris, 1978. See also, by the same author, *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism,* trans. Harry Zohn, London, New Left Books, 1973.

[63] Baudelaire, according to contemporary sources, "did not forsake Manet" during the preparatory phase of *Music in the Tuileries* on the same location. For Jean Adhémar, who relies on Claude Pichois, the poet had for some time dreamed of making Manet the hero of his text. As for the famous sentence, "You are only the first in the decrepitude of your art" (*Correspondance,* 11 May 1865), it should be taken in the opposite sense: it is Manet's fluctuations, a certain return to the museum picture (*Olympia, The Dead Christ*) and the apparent abandonment of the path opened by *Music in the Tuileries* that is being denounced (Jean Adhémar, "L'Education de Baudelaire faite par son père," *Gazette des Beaux-Arts,* March 1979).

Edouard Manet. Portrait of George Moore. *c. 1879.*
(Mr. and Mrs. Paul Mellon Collection, Upperville, Virginia.)



swords" (1855). As Gautier later explained, what fascinated Baudelaire about Guys was "the complete absence of antiquity, that is to say the classical tradition" (1868). And Baudelaire himself: "It is probably a fine thing to study the old masters in order to learn how to paint, but it can only be superfluous exercise if your goal is to understand the nature of beauty in our day."[64]

The new references are to be barbarous, eccentric, and unsophisticated. Baudelaire is interested in "that singular statuary," the toy; he is captivated by fashion plates, magazine illustrations, makeup, Indian tattoos, strolling players, the English pantomime, "commonplaces," "vulgar locutions," the phenakistoscope (a variation of Faraday's disk), and so on. He calls for a history of caricature (which Champfleury will write, in five volumes, 1865–80, as well as an *Histoire de l'imagerie populaire,* 1869). It is a question of reversing the norms, of establishing a new tradition on the cultural margins of the period, of exploring the heterogeneous corpus of the "crude arts."[65]

This first objective—the turning around of culture—is based on a second: appropriating and turning against the adversary, in a manner of spiritual judo, the energy of the society and city ("the enormous whore"), in order to release its "epic aspect" and open "the chief and essential question, which is to know whether we possess a particular beauty inherent in new passions." Here a figure beckons, as Benjamin points out:[66] that of a ragpicker as permanent agent for "recycling" the rubbish of mercantile society. Born of industrial expansion, he attracted Manet's attention (painting and drawing of 1865) as well as Baudelaire's: "Here is a man charged to collect the debris of a day in the capital. Everything the big city has rejected, everything it has lost, everything it has scorned, everything it has broken, he classifies and collects. . . . He makes a selection, an intelligent choice; he amasses, like a miser a treasure, the garbage that, having been chewed up by the god of Industry, will become objects of utility and enjoyment."[67]

It is this enjoyment that engrosses Manet. And is not his industry, too, perhaps merely a recycling: the melting down and transmutation of a city's debris in the quantitative economy of the canvas by means of speed?

"Enjoyment (*jouissance*)"—the word recurs in Baudelaire to express immersion in the crowd: "enjoyment at taking up one's abode in numbers, in fluctuation and movement, in the fleeting and infinite." "He who easily espouses the crowd knows feverish enjoyments . . . an ineffable orgy." And about Guys: "His passion and profession are to *espouse the crowd.*" For Baudelaire, such empathy must produce a new language, "a poetic prose . . . supple and abrupt enough" to reflect "the habit of huge cities" (preface to *Le Spleen de Paris*). It ought to produce a painting, as he shows in connection with Guys. But this empathy is also marked in Manet, if one only compares *Music in the Tuileries* to the numerous engravings of the period on the same theme; close as it is to them sometimes in its general conception, the painting is quite different for the quantity of affect concentrated in each touch.

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[64] Baudelaire, "Le Peintre de la vie moderne," IV.

[65] Whereby he brings together a whole current, already perceptible in romanticism during the years 1840–50—Töpffer, Courbet, Duranty, Champfleury, Gautier, Flaubert, etc.—which sees resources in naive forms and extols popular imagery, marionettes, etc. See Meyer Schapiro, "Courbet and Popular Imagery," in *Modern Art, 19th and 20th Centuries: Selected Papers,* New York, 1978, pp. 47–85.

[66] Benjamin, *Baudelaire,* pp. 35 ff.

[67] Baudelaire, "Du Vin et du hachisch," quoted by Benjamin, *Baudelaire,* p. 117.

Idler (*flâneur*), artist, detective: all of them steal through the city, on the lookout for "the lived experience of shock" (Benjamin). And Paris, notes Antonin Proust, "has never known an idler who idled more profitably [than Manet]. . . . He would draw a trifle, a profile, a hat, in a word a fleeting impression."[68] For Baudelaire, "the lover of universal life enters into the crowd as into a huge reservoir of electricity. One can also compare him to a mirror as huge as that crowd, to a kaleidoscope endowed with consciousness, which, at each of its movements, reproduces the multiplicity of life and the animated grace of all its elements. He is an *I* insatiable for the *not-I,* rendering and expressing it at every moment in images more living than life itself, which is always unstable and fleeting."[69] And in *Fusées* this sentence, itself enigmatic: "The pleasure of being in crowds is a mysterious expression of enjoyment at the multiplication of numbers."

Dispersion, reduction—what is at stake is a kaleidoscopic bursting of the subject caught in the crackle of urban stimuli. The poet or painter becomes *unstable,* in accordance with a sequence described by Baudelaire: he is a "convalescent," and this convalescence "is like a return to childhood. The convalescent, like the child, enjoys to the highest degree the faculty of interesting himself keenly in things, even the seemingly most trivial ones. . . . The child sees everything as new; he is always drunk."[70] Drunk, childish, convalescent, the poet or artist is the one who takes advantage of his weakness—all the more receptive to the world the more vulnerable he is, all the more ready to perceive the cracks in it as they pass through him. Hence his productive capacities: ". . . genius is merely *childhood rediscovered* at will, childhood now endowed, for its own expression, with virile organs. . . ."

The spirit of childhood: charm, passions, mischievousness—all of them traits conceded to Manet by his contemporaries. The detour through naive drawing seems in him a means—a brutal means—of ensuring his own strengths and cutting short any academic conditioning. The Dijon watercolor, from which the artist was to derive his *Kearsarge at Boulogne,* could appear in a school playground. See also (anticipation of Hartung) his scribbles that occupy the right part of *The Races.* (Loops and zigzags here cover not figures, as one often reads, but a few broad vertical lines drawn with the blunt end of the lithographic crayon.) Note again the figures in *The Rue Mosnier,* no less disconnected than in Dubuffet from any anatomical standards. Or even the rough sketches, boots, hats, bathers, and scribbled signatures to which the artist is addicted in his last suburban residences.

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[68] Proust, *Edouard Manet, Souvenirs,* pp. 29–30.

[69] Baudelaire, "Le Peintre de la vie moderne," III.

[70] *Ibid.* In the same passage, the poet speaks of "the fixed and animal-like ecstatic gaze of children faced with something *new,* whatever it may be, face or landscape, light, gilding, colors, shimmering fabrics, the enchantment of beauty embellished by cosmetics. . . ."

But for Baudelaire, poetic and artistic expression, even if nourished by childhood, remains a kind of sickness—a *transport*: "I declare that inspiration has some connection with *congestion,* and that every sublime thought is accompanied by a more or less violent nervous shock that resounds even in the cerebellum."[71] Under the curtailing gaze, the city turns to stone, the work grows heavy with a sedimentation that thickens it, and it is struck by "that faculty of catalepsy" of which Benjamin speaks, and which "is manifested countless times in Baudelaire's poetry like a sort of imitation of death. . . ."[72]

Captured in the brevity of a modern, undeceived gaze born in the flash of the guillotine, Paris becomes hollow and turns into necrotized tissue, with its tiered galleries of bones, its piles of skulls and femurs photographed by Nadar in 1861—and whose shadow seems to lie across Baudelaire's footsteps, a huge death's head, the brown and light spots of the pavements being laid down in stretches on Haussmann's new boulevards, the same death's head that chatters right in the middle of the painting from which Nina de Callias stares out at us—and this time without benefit of anamorphosis.

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I recognize Manet's touch in what Benjamin writes about Baudelaire. He speaks of "an uninterrupted succession of tiny improvisations," of "fencing" whose feints, dodges, and points reproduce the shocks and hazards of the poet's life.[73] Manet's touch: brief impulses, curtailed gesture, restrained breadth—something both admirably precise (he is, as they say, a masterful *"toucheur"*) and suspended. Focillon, in studying the etchings, mentions "light accentuation," "abridged vivacity, as though contained," and "sparing, largely discontinuous touches."[74] And Mallarmé, quoting the artist's words, speaks of them the way Fénéon, ten years later, will speak of Seurat's pointillism: "The hand [according to Manet] must become an organ of impersonal abstraction, guided solely by the will, and forgetful of all previous dexterity."[75] Here there is nothing comparable to Ingres's arabesque, which administers the whole surface from the outset; nor with the corporeal investment of Matisse, for whom "to draw is to make an expressive gesture that has the advantage of permanence."[76] Line, in Manet, was sometimes able to acquire continuity, but it never stems from jubilation, from physical élan. The "fury that hurled him on the empty canvas" is by no means the energy of the romantics, the "impulsive optimism" that made Delacroix imagine that the truth and expressive power of the (figural) image would burst forth in an uncontrollable stream. A body pierced by the vital spirits of nature, which pass in transit over the canvas before going on to strike and transport the spectators—no one is further than Manet from this pathos, this connivance between the world and the body. He is as indifferent to organic composition, all élan and movement, as he is to classical structure.

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[71] *Ibid.*

[72] Benjamin, *Baudelaire,* p. 124.

[73] *Ibid.,* p. 107.

[74] Henri Focillon, "Manet en noir et blanc," *Maîtres de l'estampe,* Paris, 1969 (1927), pp. 177 ff.

At the start, then, nothing. No organic, biological origin, no reservoir of impulse, no bodily exuberance. Nothing between the body and the (syncopated, unprimed) touch, nothing between the gesture and the surface (no taking charge of the area of the painting).

A double game with the spot (*tache*), back and forth between two demands, two strata of the painting. Manet strives to violate the space between the image and the "background"—a "background" no longer topographical but textural, present in every square inch of the painting, a "background" pasted in front of the image, and stretched toward the *superficies.* The unity of the work, always hoped for, always comforting, decomposes into a multitude of small geological dramas, textural elevations, and accidents in which it is the onlooker, torn between the image and its defection, who chooses. The subversion of the image by its material, with a resulting amputation of the *istoria,* of the iconic pattern that had guaranteed its coherence.

Spots that cease to denote. Mortified surfaces. Here the succulent blue of that eye becomes matter, just enough matter to keep me from reappropriating the figure for myself in its first burst, and making my return to the sphere of pleasure. A fall outside of the image, disillusion. The painting would be this Eurydice, this experience of falling, this intimate spreading out of two intervals of the gaze—between which the cutting edge of something irreversible is inserted. Nothing would remain but a mineral desert, ruins, a structure of exclusion. The painting *turns.* The surface is galvanized, provoking a shock, a small but unfathomable upset, a dull stupor, a furtive commotion, an ankylosis. The painting is petrified (and so are we). What is at stake is the spell of which Valéry and Bataille spoke, but it is a spell thrown at the spectator. A twofold demand: this would have been the theme of Poe's story "The Oval Portrait" if

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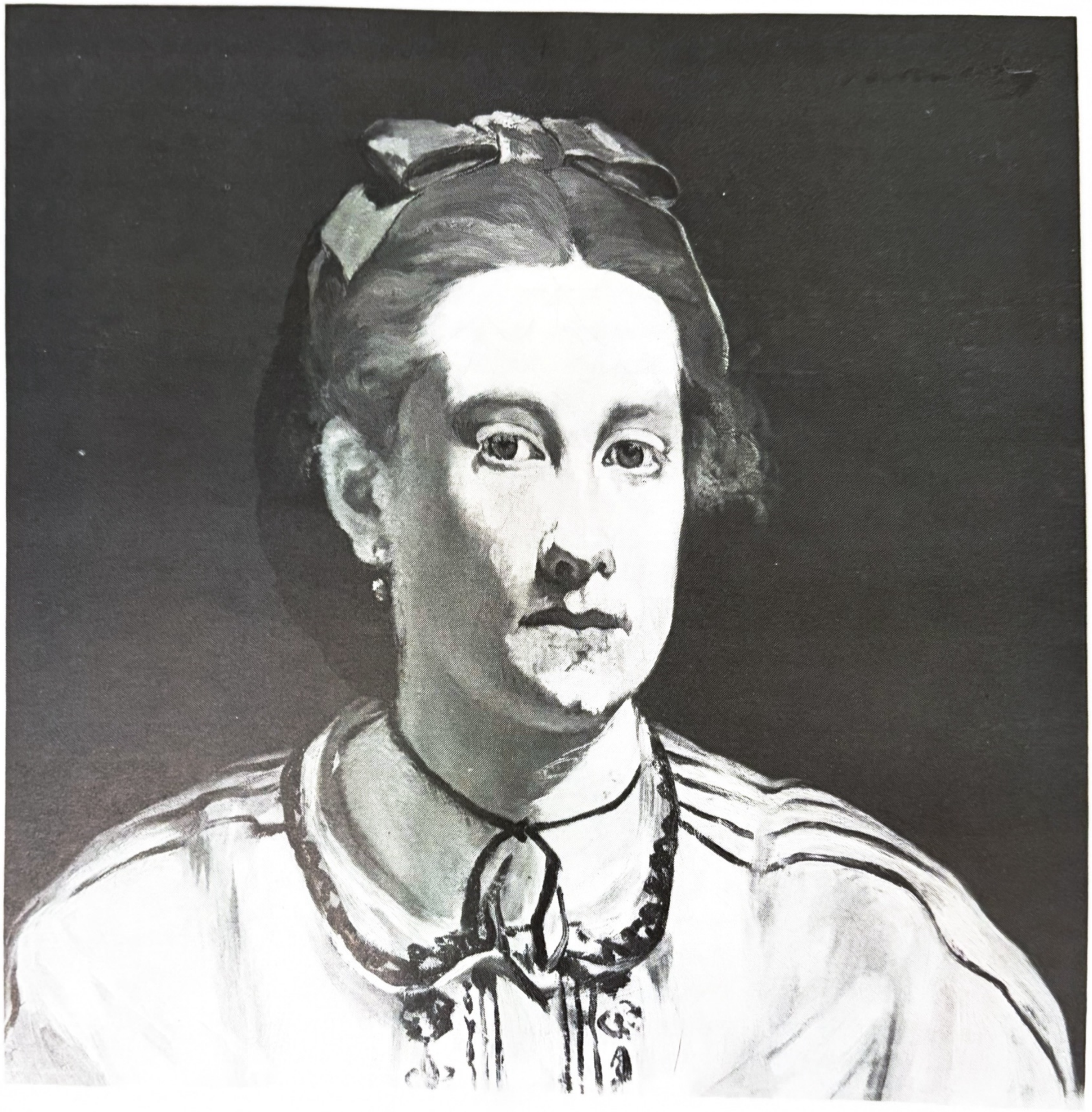
[75] Mallarmé, "Les Impressionistes et Edouard Manet," p. 149.

[76] Henri Matisse, *Écrits et propos sur l'art,* ed. D. Fourcade, Paris, 1972, p. 67.



Edouard Manet. Portrait of Victorine Meurent. *1862.*

the advent of the image and the detachment and decay of the model had condensed on the surface of a painting.[77] Look at Hals for an example of verve, of very free, flaking, and jagged strokes. But not this wreckage, this collapse of matter, these deposits *in excess*—as on Victorine Meurent's chin (in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts portrait), where nothing but a lack of strength, an indifference to the mimetic, forces the artist to break the curve of the face with thick daubs of light ocher (as though the superfluous lines of his youthful drawings were coming back). Manet, writes Bataille, is "searching for a risk that goes beyond and upsets the expected arrangement of the image."[78] However far you stand from *Nina,* the arm remains a succession of yellow slabs, and the veiling over the shoulder a luscious flow of green and gray pigment. It was Zola's error to believe that with Manet, as with seventeenth-century painting, it was enough to stand "at a respectful distance" to bestow unity and placidity on the figure.

Connivance of the rapid (quickly seen, quickly painted) and the heavy (the image drawn toward the weight of its material); the overlapping of the quick and the dead. Mallarmé was aware of this fatal adherence of the material as background of the painting ("this art made of ointments and paints"). He was aware in Manet of the possible defection of the image, when he spoke of "a spell easily broken by an added touch."[79] His remedy is to pause briefly, "a minute," the time required "for a spectator to see and admire what is represented, with just enough readiness to allow the truth."[80] As though by lingering, loitering before the canvas, looking back like Lot's wife, one ran the risk of seeing the sort of riveting give way that holds the two states of the work, simultaneously superimposed and merged, together.

The swing from one state to the other, and the shock effect it involves, have nothing in common with the acceptance, through clarification, of an abstract canvas. It is by no means a question of ascertaining *under* the figure the advent of a certain *tachisme.* Nothing is established here of a new nonfigurative consistency. The work does not sink further into the amorphous flabbiness of inert and muddy paint. In the "gradation" between figure and texture, the first is endlessly reified and congealed *as surface,* and it is this hardening that is shown to us, the ever recommenced burying of objects and human forms in the *superficies* of the painting.

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[77] Concerning *Madame Manet in the Conservatory* (1879), Jacques-Émile Blanche points out "that miraculous vein in which modern seriousness, the modern touch, and a sort of funereal solemnity are combined." And a little earlier: ". . . no one would risk entrusting his head to the portrait painter. The result was thought to be 'dead,' expressionless" (Blanche, *Manet,* pp. 38–39).

Paul Mantz, in 1884, in a retrospective article on Manet, mentions "his pastels in which *morbidezza* softens forms" (*Le Temps,* January 16, 1884). Antonin Artaud, in 1927, finds in his painting "something gamy, turning green" (*Oeuvres complètes,* vol. I, Paris, 1956 [1927], p. 179). And Bataille writes of *The Execution of Maximilian* (Mannheim version): "This painting strangely suggests the anaesthetizing of a tooth; it emits a feeling of encroaching numbness" (Georges Bataille, *Manet,* Geneva, 1955, p. 52).

[78] Bataille, *Manet,* p. 102.

[79] Mallarmé, "Le Jury de peinture," p. 698.

[80] Mallarmé, "Les Impressionistes et Edouard Manet," p. 152.

Bataille has written an authoritative description of this "sliding," which is not "neglect of the (figural) subject but something else." He compares it to a "sacrifice, which alters, destroys, kills the victim, *without neglecting it.* After all, the subject of Manet's canvases is less destroyed than bypassed; it is less annulled to the advantage of the naked painting than *transfigured* in the nakedness of that painting. . . . No one loaded the subject more: if not with meaning, with what, being simply *beyond* meaning, is more than it."[81]

As though to exorcise a deadening oscillation, Mallarmé undertakes to add an airy principle to the interpretation of Manet's works.[82] Objecting because of its brutality to the use of artificial light in the art of the female portrait—for then "the subject of the work would be reduced to the woman herself"—he explains that the painter's subject is not the face, but the suspension of down that separates us from it. The painter has more to do "with this pollen of flesh than with any human charm." And in order to be perceived and appreciated, this subtle deposit requires "daylight, that is, space with the transparency of air alone." Mallarmé's imagination here assigns to painting all that is *close by* the woman, the volatile cloud that envelopes her, the light mist by which she is grazed. In the text that follows, the author, not without a certain duplicity, plays on the confusion between "air" as (impressionist) theme, suitable for producing the dilution of forms, the mingling of the objects represented, and "air" as "medium," effectively intervening in the *application* of pigment and infiltrating itself into the interweaving of brushstrokes: ". . . since no artist has on his palette a transparent and neutral color corresponding to open air, the desired effect can only be obtained by the lightness or heaviness of touch, or by the regulation of the tone. Now Manet and his school use a fresh and simple color, lightly applied."[83]

Thus it is no longer a question of *representing* the vibrations of light, but of *presenting* the gaps, the interstices, the layers of paint. Paint so airy and ductile that one must at all cost prevent it from thickening and becoming a leaden mass: "Is it that this atmosphere, which the artifice of the painter spreads over the whole surface of the painted object, is not going to disappear when the completely finished work appears as though repainted?" Finished picture equals repainted picture. The layers crushed, the "air" vanished. The work exists only by the suspension of its powders hanging over the canvas. To stare at these is to kill the work (and by powder, Mallarmé means the coloring agents in the oil as well. In speaking of Morisot, he evokes "the fragile powder of the paint").

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[81] Bataille, *Manet,* p. 103.

[82] Mallarmé, "Les Impressionistes et Edouard Manet."

[83] Many of Manet's paintings lend themselves to the interpretation here given by Mallarmé. And not only by their themes—which so often refer to those of the poet, gauze, veils, fans, tulle, curtains, vases, reflections, everything that floats and interposes itself, arousing and postponing desire—but also by their manner: "Manet, with his sable brushes or his thin, flat, square ones, would pile up stratifications of semi-blots. . . . The successive layers of silvery white, mixed with a few pinks and a touch of ocher and Venetian red, did not seem to bear down on each other, but to become lighter by contact" (Blanche, *Les Arts plastiques,* p. 53).

In a context dominated by naturalism (Duranty's manifesto *La Nouvelle peinture* is from this same year, 1876), one should note that Mallarmé in no way proposes—as his Wagnerian and symbolist followers were soon to do—an escape outside the sphere of the tangible; he does not suggest the autonomy of color and line insofar as "they think for themselves." He proceeds to the opposite, by raising the stakes in mimetism. It is a question of carrying mimetism onto the terrain of the painting's fabrication.

Not to paint women, but *the way* these women are painted. Not faces, but that which, on these faces, is painting: makeup. To paint, not the structure of the model (bones, muscle), but the surface areas where the object offers itself as light sedimentation, and to render these sprinklings of powder by the powder of the pigment. Manet, in this respect, would have chosen to identify the object that he paints and the procedure that makes it possible to paint it. He would flatten the referent on the canvas, favoring in his choice of objects the rich surfaces that are already those of painting.

But whether he pushes the separation between model and figure to the limit (this happens when he covers someone's features with a thick layer), or on the contrary proceeds by a surplus of mimetism (by painting not the object but what produces painting in the object), it is all the same in the end. What is crushed in both cases is the denotative function, the exercise of the copy. Either the artist brutally challenges the process of representation (first case), or else he annuls it by the identity of the two terms: the object and the painting. The ultimate Mallarméan reversal: if the face is only worth something to the artist because it is already a painting (a painted/cosmetic surface), the painting in its turn is worth something as a face. It has the properties of one: penetrated by air and light ("which makes everything come alive"), fleeting, mobile, it must contain nothing "completely arrested, so that we can feel that the shining light that illuminates the painting, or the diaphanous shadow that veils it, are only seen in passing, just at the moment when the spectator looks at the subject represented, which, composed of a harmony of reflected and ceaselessly changing light, cannot be supposed to seem constantly the same, but throbs with movement, light, and life." Beyond Hoffmann's fiction of a living surface, a surface/skin (the homology of painting and the transparence of flesh once engaged the minds of Diderot and Hegel)—what speaks to us today in Mallarmé's text, and coincides with certain contemporary experiments,[84] is the hypothesis there formulated, in view of Manet's paintings, of a painting as something overhanging, suspended, and dense, creating weight in space. Ointments, makeup, pollen: it is still a question of performing, albeit in an infinitely slight way, a transverse section in the painted surface, considered as a henceforth problematic place of apposition, and by the same token emptying it of whatever persists here or there of compositional economy.

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[84] Thus the notions of weight, density, and transversality of the layer were at the center of the discussions held by the JaNaPa group in Paris in 1978. See the above-mentioned issue of *Macula,* 1979.

Manet paints painting—that of the museums, that of faces. By signing his work, he exposes himself to the trials and tribulations of the world.